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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Power and Justice in Thucydides' Peloponnesian War

BY

Peter Charles Goode

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Edmonton, Alberta
FALL 1992

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled POWER AND JUSTICE IN THUCYDIDES' PELOPONNESIAN WAR submitted by PETER CHARLES GOODE in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

Lawrence Pratt

Tom Keating

Robert Buck

October 8, 1992

For my family.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of the themes of power and justice in Thucydides' Peloponnesian War. Through the History, there is a struggle between justice and expediency, the strong and the weak, in the realm of international affairs. Ultimately, it is the expedient and the strong that prevail: Thucydides' History is meant to show foreign affairs as they are, not how they should be. Thucydides' realism, however, is not a teaching in cynicism, but rather a teaching in prudence.

The study examines the debate over the fate of Mytilene, the Melian Dialogue, and the debate over and the launching of the Sicilian expedition. The Mytilenaean Debate explores issues of justice and expediency as they relate to foreign policy, and also is a study in statesmanship. The Melian Dialogue raises questions about the normative dimensions of realism, the nature of imperialism, and it is a teaching in political sobriety perhaps unparalleled in any other source. The study of the debate on, and launching of the Sicilian expedition is a study of statesmanship, and raises basic questions about the motives behind war and conquest.

Thucydides never presents a straightforward teaching in his own words in the History, but by examining these important episodes, a prudential approach to foreign affairs can be discerned. It is for this reason, among others, that Thucydides' Peloponnesian War is deserving to be held as one of the classical works in political literature, and offers students of politics an invaluable source for political learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much of what is good in this study is because of the efforts and insights of other people. I would like to thank Dr. Robert Buck for his learned comments on the manuscript, which I believe strengthened the thesis. Dr. Tom Keating deserves much credit for his insight into international relations theory, and his teaching was invaluable in terms of that aspect of the study. Dr. Lawrence Pratt deserves special praise as my supervisor for the thesis. His knowledge of Thucydides, international affairs, and the discipline of political science in general place him among the top in his field: he is truly a scholar and a gentleman. His guidance was invaluable at all stages of the preparation of the thesis, and his comments strengthened the study enormously. Needless to say, any shortcomings in the thesis are a reflection on the author, and not on these learned teachers.

On a more personal note, this study would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of my family. It is to them that this thesis is dedicated.

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> Neither in what we claim nor what we do are we outside of what man thinks about the gods and what he wishes for himself. For of the gods we think according to the common opinion; and of men, that for certain by necessity of nature they will everywhere reign over such as they be too strong for. Neither did we make this law nor are we the first that use it made; but as we found it, and shall leave it to posterity for ever, so also we use it, knowing that you likewise, and others that should have the same power which we have, would do the same.
>
> -Speech by the Athenians to the Melians at Melos, V.105.1-.3. [1]

The study of history as a way of understanding international affairs is as old as Western civilization itself. Some very great minds have undertaken to discern a lasting teaching on the nature of relations between states, and among the greatest is that of Thucydides. Yet, Thucydides never refers to himself as an historian; indeed, even the Greek word for history to which he refers (I.22.5) does not convey the same sense of history as we understand it today. History from the Greek historia connotes an inquiry or an investigation into things: so while Thucydides' work may be referred to as his History, it should be done in the spirit that Thucydides understood it in his investigation of international affairs, on the Peloponnesian War.

Many have questioned the teaching of Thucydides, either directly or indirectly, in its relevance or insight into international affairs: one could hold that his views are of historical relevance only to fifth century B.C.

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[1] Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War: The Complete Hobbes Translation with Notes and a New Introduction by David Grene, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989. All references to Thucydides in this study are made from this edition, unless otherwise noted. I refer to Thucydides in standard notation: book, chapter, and where necessary, sentence e.g. (III.2.1).

rather than our contemporary situation. But after the experiences of the twentieth century, wherein two terrible wars erupted in the very heart of the modern, enlightened world, it is not without reason that we return to the sober teaching of Thucydides.

The focus of this study is power and justice in Thucydides' Peloponnesian War, and how they are developed through the History, as a way of understanding international affairs. Through the History, there is a struggle between justice and expediency, the strong and the weak, and ultimately, it is the expedient and the strong that prevail. The foreign policies most successful are those that are the most realistic, or those that face situations with a clear view of the facts at hand. W.K.C. Guthrie described this type of realism of the period as:

> ...an attitude of hard-headed realism of fact-facing which without passing judgement declares that the more powerful will always take advantage of the weaker, and will give the name of law and justice to whatever they lay down in their own interests. It will retain the name for as long as they keep their power. [2]

I have selected three important episodes from the History to develop my argument: the debate over the fate of Mytilene (III.36-.50); the Melian Dialogue (V.84-.116); and the debate over and the launching of the Sicilian expedition (VI.1.-32).

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[2] W.K.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, Volume III, p. 60.

The first chapter of this study, on the Mytilenaean debate, explores issues of justice and expediency as they relate to foreign policy, and the conduct of international affairs. It is important as a study of statesmanship, between the demagogue Cleon and the otherwise unknown Diodotus.

The second chapter is a study of the Melian Dialogue. It raises questions about the normative aspects of realism as an approach to foreign policy, the nature of imperialism, and considerations of political judgement in very difficult circumstances. Most importantly, though, it is a teaching in political sobriety perhaps unparalleled in any other source, seriously probing the relationship of power and justice in international affairs.

The third chapter is an examination of the debate on, and launching of, the Sicilian expedition. It is important in so far as it is a study of statesmanship relating to foreign policy at its highest level - it raises basic questions about the motives behind war and conquest. Further, it raises important questions about power and justice in international affairs.

The purpose of this study is to show that Thucydides in his History is attempting to develop the proposition that power and interest are more important considerations than justice in war, and perhaps generally in international affairs. Further, Thucydides' realism does not allow for considerations of justice in international affairs, although he did think

justice both possible and desirable within the state.[3] From Thucydides' perspective, this is a bleak world that constitutes international affairs; and yet, his balance, objectivity, and humane character shine through his work, making his History not a teaching in cynicism, but an invaluable work in political thought that teaches prudence in foreign affairs. It is for these reasons among others that Thucydides' Peloponnesian War is deserving to be held as one of the great works in the classical tradition of the West.

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[3] Consider his condemnation of the brutality in the revolutions in Corcyra (III.82).

In the summer of the fourth year of the War recorded by Thucydides, the Peloponnesian alliance marched into Attica under the command of Spartan King Archidamus, son of Zeuxidamus. Immediately following this invasion, the entire island of Lesbos, except for Methymne, revolted from Athens. Lesbos had been an ally of Athens in the War, but before the revolt was not a subject state like other Athenian allies. Yet even before the War, the Lesbians had wanted to revolt, but the Spartans had been unwilling to receive them into their alliance. Now, however, the Lesbians were "forced to revolt sooner than they had intended to do" (III.2.1). The Lesbians were planning on waiting until they had narrowed the mouth of their harbour, built up walls, and finished the shipbuilding that they had been undertaking. They were also waiting for the arrival of various supplies from Pontus, including archers and corn. However, various groups of Lesbians like the Tenedians, the Methymnaeans, and a "faction" (III.2.3) within the city of Mytilene itself which represented the interests of Athens informed the Athenians that the Mytilenaeans were forcibly taking the whole of Lesbos under their control. Further, the Athenians were told that the Mytilenaeans in their actions were cooperating with the Spartans and their kinsmen the Boeotians in making their revolt. Finally, the Athenians were told that all of Lesbos would be lost unless they acted promptly.

At this time, the Athenians were suffering from the effects of the plague and were under the strain of war. They were quite concerned about

the possibility of having to fight Lesbos at the same time as the rest of the Peloponnesian alliance, as the Lesbians had a considerable fleet. At first, though, the Athenians did not believe that the accusations about Mytilene were true. But after their ambassadors could not persuade the Mytilenaeans to dissolve their union of Lesbos or stay their preparations for war, the Athenians feared the worst and decided to act before it was too late.

The Athenians subsequently cut off Mytilene from the sea (III.6), and the Mytilenaeans were eventually forced to come to terms with the Athenians as their supply of food ran out, and support from the Peloponnesian fleet was not in time to be of any help (III.27). The terms that the Mytilenaeans agreed to with the Athenian general Paches were that Athens would have the right to do as she pleased with the people of Mytilene and that the Athenian army would be allowed to enter the city. Further, the Mytilenaeans were to send representatives to Athens to defend themselves, and Paches was not to imprison, enslave or kill any of the population. Paches found the Spartan general Salaethus in Mytilene and sent him back to Athens together with the Mytilenaeans whom he considered implicated in the organization of the revolt, as well as a good part of his own army.

Salaethus was put to death immediately upon his arrival in Athens with the other prisoners. In discussing what to do with the others, "in their passion" (III.36.2) the Athenians decided to put to death not only the

prisoners but all of the men of Mytilene, and to make slaves of the women and children. The Athenians resented the fact that Mytilene had revolted even though it was not a subject state and did not have to pay tribute like other Athenian allies: Mytilene had retained its walls and fleet, and was powerful, free and prosperous. The Athenians were further angered by the fact that the Peloponnesians had sailed across into the Athenian- controlled Ionian Sea to support the revolt. It was believed by the Athenians that these circumstances pointed to a revolt that had been long premeditated. The Athenians thus sent to Paches in Mytilene a trireme to inform him of their decision.

The day after, the Athenians "felt a kind of repentance in themselves and began to consider what a great and cruel decree it was that not the authors only but the whole city should be destroyed" (III.36.5). The Athenians were thus concerned on the grounds of justice with the decision they had made.

An assembly was called at once, and among those who came forward to speak was Cleon. Cleon had been responsible in the previous assembly for helping to pass the motion to put the Mytilenaeans to death. Thucydides remarks of Cleon that he was "of all the citizens most violent and with the people at that time far the most powerful" (III.36.7). Thucydides does not have any kind words for Cleon - this is his first appearance and he is judged very harshly indeed. Subsequently, Thucydides refers to the "vain" speech

made by Cleon which was "heard with great content of the wiser sort" as it held out the possibility to rid themselves of Cleon "which was their greatest hope" (IV.28.6-.7). At V.16.1, Thucydides remarks on his "evil actions" and his "calumniations". Further, the words Thucydides uses to describe Cleon before the debate are repeated when the Syracusan demagogue Athenagoras is introduced in the debate at Syracuse (VI.35.4).

Cleon's speech is designed to persuade the Athenians to carry out the sentence that they had decided upon the previous day. Cleon attempts to do this by making two important and related points in his argument. The first point is to add the question of expediency or interest to the debate, which, we should remember, was originally called to consider the justice of the Athenian policy towards Mytilene. The second point is Cleon's attack on the "rhetoricians" of Athens that "delight...with their orations" on issues that are important to the state, and in so doing he questions their fidelity to Athens (III.40.5-.6). [4] However we may view Cleon's speech, it is powerful, and it is important for understanding the relationship of justice and expediency in foreign affairs.

Cleon claims that a democracy is incapable of "dominion over others" - that is, to keep others as subject states in an imperial manner (III.37.1). He is all the more convinced of this by the way the Athenians are changing

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[4] See Clifford Orwin, "The Just and the Advantageous: The Case of the Mytilenaian Debate" in American Political Science Review, Volume 78, Number 2, June 1984, p.486.

their minds about the Mytilenaeans. Cleon believes that because the Athenians live lives of "security and openness" in democratic Athens, it leads them astray in foreign affairs (III.37.2). This is the same sort of argument that the Corinthians use at the Congress at Sparta (I.68) in faulting the Spartans for their own particular view of foreign affairs. Quite simply, the confederates of Athens do not like being subject to Athens' rule, and the Athenians are not sufficiently aware of this fact because of their democratic way of life. Cleon makes it clear that the Athenian empire "is a tyranny" and "those that be subject to it are against their wills so and are plotting continually against you" (III.37.2).

Cleon's characterization of the Athenian empire as a tyranny is different than the one offered by Pericles in his Funeral Oration (II.35-.46).[5] There, Pericles says that Athens

> is in general a school of the Grecians, and that the men here have everyone in particular his person disposed to most diversity of actions, and yet all with grace and decency. And that this is not now rather a bravery of words upon the occasion than real truth, this power of the city, which by these institutions we have obtained, maketh evident. For it is the only power now found greater in proof than fame, and the only power that...giveth [no] cause to the subjected states to murmur as being in subjection to men unworthy (II.41.1-.2).

Pericles' defence of empire rests on the worthiness of Athens to rule her empire due to her power, but also on the civilizing influence of Pericles

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[5] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, translated by P. Thody, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1963, pp.140-141; 160-194.

himself, who led Athens with "moderation" according to Thucydides (II.65.6). [6] And whereas Pericles' version of Athenian imperialism celebrates the glory of Athens and her empire, Cleon's view of the Athenian empire is characterized by a harshness towards her subjects and is guided by expediency and interest alone. [7] Pericles does refer to the Athenian empire as being "in the nature of a tyranny" (II.63.4); however, he does continue to insist on the "present splendour" of the empire and the "immortal glory" that will belong to Athens because of it (II.64.8). In other words, there is something above profit and fear that is part of Pericles' view of empire (cf. I.75). What Cleon does have to say about that which is above Athens' own profit or fear - justice - is about punitive justice, which coincides, he believes, with Athens' interests.

Although it is clear that the empire is unjust (II.63.4), Thucydides writes that Athens and her empire at the time of Pericles' rule was Athens at her greatest (II.65.6). It may be held that this is a real contradiction: being aware that the Athenian empire is unjust and yet holding that Athens was at her greatest under Pericles who did celebrate the empire - but there

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[6] Cf. Peter R. Pouncey, The Necessities of War: A Study of Thucydides' Pessimism, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p.85.

[7] Cf. Leo Strauss, The City and Man, Phoenix edition, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 213-4.

is a connection. [8] Imperial Athens in all its splendour as we witness it in Pericles' Funeral Oration was not a moderate city: Athens had "set up everywhere eternal memorials of both good deeds and ill" (II.41.5) - it strove for the conquest of Sicily, and the conquest of Carthage and all of mainland Greece was considered. This points to the most unbridled hubris and daring by Athens - it points towards universal rule and empire - which is indeed doomed to failure because human beings are mortals; and further, is totally incompatible with moderation or justice because of this fact. But there is something noble in striving for universals - indeed, Thucydides' whole work is presented to the reader as an "everlasting possession" to "look into the truth of things done and which (according to the condition of humanity) may be done again" (1.22.6-.7). Thucydides undoubtedly admires the greatness of Athens in regards to those elements of enlightenment that we see in a man like Diodotus or the civil progress he records in I.6: but that admiration of greatness does also spill over into the more political themes and statesmen, such as the Athenian empire, as well as to Themistocles and Pericles. As Leo Strauss wrote,

> ...the everlasting glory for which Pericles longed is achieved not by Pericles but by Thucydides. The political daring and the virtues and vices which go with it make possible the highest daring. Understanding the universal and sempiternal things,

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[8] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, pp. 366-367; Leo Strauss, The City and Man, pp.226-236; Christopher Bruell, "Thucydides' View of Athenian Imperialism" in American Political Science Review, Volume LXVIII, Number 1, March 1974, p.17.

> seeing through the delusions by which the healthy city stands or falls, is possible only for thinkers who ride a tiger. One must go beyond this. In Athens the two heterogenous universalisms become in a way fused: the fantastic political universalism becomes tinged, coloured, suffused, transfigured by the true universalism, by the love of beauty and of wisdom as Thucydides understands beauty and wisdom, and it thus acquires its tragic character; it thus becomes able to foster a manly gentleness. The "synthesis" of the two universalisms is indeed impossible. It is of the utmost importance that this impossibility be understood. Only by understanding it can one understand the grandeur of the attempt to overcome it and admire it.[9]

The decline of the Athenian view of her empire as suggested at this time by Cleon parallels a deterioration in the leadership of Athenian politics during the War, and as we shall see, the Athenian leaders made some terrible mistakes. Expediency and interest, and not higher considerations of glory or honour[10], not even to mention prudence, moderation or justice, become the guiding principles in foreign affairs for Athens.[11]

According to Cleon, the obedience that Athens' allies pay to her is not because of a sense of friendship or good will, but rather because of the brute force of Athens: Athens' allies "obey you not for any good turn, which

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[9] Leo Strauss, The City and Man, p. 230.

[10] This is not to say that individuals, as distinct from the city of Athens, were not motivated by more than fear or interest. See below Chapter Three regarding Alcibiades and the Sicilian expedition. Cf. Christopher Bruell, "Thucydides' View of Athenian Imperialism", p. 17.

[11] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, p. 329, footnote 1, "As we pass from Pericles to Cleon both morality and wisdom are lost altogether".

to your own detriment you shall do them, but only for that you exceed them in strength, and for no good will" (III.37.2). Cleon considers the interests of Athens and their subjects as being clearly opposed. The Mytilenaeans want to destroy the Athenians; "what have they done but conspired against us and rather warred upon us than revolted from us (for a revolt is only of such as suffer violence) and joined with our bitterest enemies to destroy us?" (III.39.3). Cleon believes that an alliance can only be kept in line by fear or terror:

> Indeed we should not formerly have done any honour more to the Mytilenaeans than to the rest of our confederates, for then they had never come to this degree of insolence. For it is natural to men to condemn those that observe them and to have in admiration such as will not give them away (III.39.8-.9).

For Cleon, the subjects of the Athenian empire are enemies of Athens and this situation cannot be changed. As he says, the empire that Athens rules means that the subject states "must also of necessity have been our enemies forever hereafter" (III.40.4).

Cleon believes that for these reasons, the only course of action for Athens to take towards her empire, Mytilene included, is one based on strength and expediency, not on justice or good will. Mytilene must be punished, and the slaughter carried out. Cleon nevertheless maintains that following his advice is the just thing to do as far as Mytilene is concerned, and at the same time it is in Athens' interests to do so. Further to Cleon's way of thinking, even if Athens were not to consider justice, expediency

demands that Athens carry out the slaughter. For if Athens intends to hold on to her empire, she must act as Cleon advocates: the only alternative that he can see for Athens would be to give up the empire.

> In sum I say only this, that if you follow my advice, you shall do that which is both just in respect of the Mytilenaeans and profitable for yourselves; whereas if you decree otherwise, you do not gratify them but condemn yourselves. For if these have justly revolted, you must unjustly have had dominion over them. Nay though your dominion be against reason, yet if you resolve to hold it, you must also, as a matter conducing thereunto, against reason punish them; or else you must give your dominion over [and be honest men from a position of no danger] (III.40.7-.9).

Cleon believes that by carrying out the actions against Mytilene, the Athenians would enable themselves to concentrate more upon defeating the Spartan alliance in the War, and would not be burdened to such an extent with their own allies. Thus Mytilene is to serve as an example to others - "a clear example that death is their sentence whensoever they shall rebel. Which when they know, you shall the less often have occasion to neglect your enemies and fight against your own confederates" (III.40.14-.15). The death penalty previously decided upon and advocated by Cleon in this speech is to be a deterrent to future wrongdoers - an important theme in Cleon's speech, and one on which Diodotus focuses on in his response to Cleon.

Cleon's speech, however, does not simply focus on justice and expediency and their role in foreign affairs: it is about democracy as well. The two are related, as Cleon wishes to challenge other speakers who would

argue against his foreign policy on the grounds of their loyalty to Athens. The issues raised concerning domestic politics by Cleon are important in so far as they set conditions or terms for the response made by Diodotus to Cleon, show the deepening of corruption and distrust in Athenian politics, and most significantly, threaten to deny Athens sound political leadership in the midst of a great war. This last point is one that Thucydides himself makes at II.65.19 - "For through private quarrels about who should bear the greatest sway with the people they both abated the vigour of the army and then also first troubled the state at home with division".

Cleon makes his attack on Athenian democracy right from the beginning in his speech. His belief that a democracy cannot rule an empire (III.37.1) and his charge that the democratic way of life makes Athenians blind to the realities of foreign affairs (III.37.2) are overshadowed by what he believes is the

> worst mischief of all...that nothing we decree shall stand firm and that we will not know that a city with the worse laws, if immoveable, is better than one with good laws when they be not binding, and that a plain wit accompanied with modesty is more profitable to the state than dexterity with arrogance, and that the more ignorant sort of men do, for the most part, better regulate a commonwealth than they that are wiser (III.37.3).

Cleon thus attacks the intellectuals of Athens for attempting to appear wiser than the laws, and in doing so criticizes them for making self-indulgent speeches for their own amusement and benefit to the detriment of Athens on matters of great importance. Cleon claims to speak for and in the

interests of the Athenian demos, or "the more ignorant sort of men". Cleon, the classic demagogue, attempts to enlist the people's distrust of elites, and he takes the argument a step further by playing on the peoples distrust of their own judgement for not being distrustful enough of the elites (III.37-.38). [12] Cleon finishes his attack on the intellectuals in III.38.3-.4.

> I do wonder also what he is that shall stand up now to contradict me and shall think to prove that the injuries by the Mytilenaeans are good for us or that our calamities are any damage to our confederates. For certainly he must either trust in his eloquence to make you believe that that which was decreed was not decreed or, moved with lucre, must with some elaborate speech endeavour to seduce you.

Cleon thus declares that anyone who speaks against him is either a clever liar or bribed: either way, it is clear that such a position taken by Cleon would make it very difficult for anyone to speak out against his policy. Cleon's argument is in a sense very un-Athenian - it attacks Pericles' praise of the Athenian practice of public discussion on important matters of policy (cf. II.40), and further, it attacks the faith that the Athenians had in reason and education for the advancement of the public interest that is the bedrock on which these discussions take place.

Cleon's speech is made all the more powerful as it attempts to restore the passion (III.36.2) that initially made the Athenians declare their harsh sentence on the Mytilenaeans. "Let us not therefore betray ourselves, but

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[12] Cf. Clifford Orwin, "The Just and the Advantageous: The Case of the Mytilenaian Debate", p.486; Leo Strauss, The City and Man, p.233, footnote 93.

in contemplation of what you were near suffering and how you once prized above all things else to have them in your power, requite them now accordingly" (III.40.12). Justice, or punitive justice, is to be decided upon in the moment of anger or passion. In Cleon's way of thinking, one should not allow for distancing oneself from the initial incident for a calm reflection on the merits of the situation, or to try and stand above ones own passions: indeed, it advocates the exact opposite.

Cleon is certainly an important character for Thucydides' account of the War as a whole. The War evoked hostilities towards sound political leadership, and this is apparent in Cleon's speech and Thucydides' judgement of him. Subsequently in Book III, we have Thucydides' account of the Civil War in Corcyra (III.69-.85), and Cleon's harsh character in the Mytilenaean debate foreshadows that terrible spectacle. Putting Cleon into perspective, it is worthwhile to consider what Thucydides has to say about Pericles and his successors before we consider the speech made by Diodotus.

> For as long as [Pericles] was in the authority in the city in time of peace, he governed the same with moderation and was a faithful watchman of it; and in his time it was at the greatest. And after the war was on foot, it is manifest that he therein also foresaw what it could do...The reason whereof was this: that being a man of great power both for his dignity and wisdom, and for bribes manifestly the most incorrupt, he freely controlled the multitude and was not so much led by them as he led them. Because, having gotten his power by no evil arts, he would not humour them in his speeches but out of his authority durst anger them with contradiction. Therefore, whensoever he saw them out of season insolently bold, he would with his orations put them into a fear; and again, when they were afraid without reason, he would likewise erect their spirits and

> embolden them. It was in name a state democratical, but in fact a government of the principal man. But they that came after, being more equal amongst themselves and affecting everyone to be the chief, applied themselves to the people and let go the care of the commonwealth...For through private quarrels about who should bear the greatest sway with the people they both abated the vigour of the army and then also first troubled the state at home with division (III.65.6-.19).

After Cleon, Diodotus, the son of Eucrates, comes forward to speak. Thucydides tells us precious little about this remarkable man, other than the fact that in the previous day's assembly, he "opposed most the putting of the Mytilenaeans to death" (III.41.2). He only appears this once in Thucydides' entire work, and is otherwise unknown. [13] It is noteworthy, however, that his name does mean "Gift of Zeus". [14] As we shall see, the speech made by Diodotus is a masterful piece of statesmanship in both its design and insight into politics.

The first task for Diodotus is to deal with Cleon's denigration of those who would speak out against the demagogue's policy and to purge the Athenian <u>demos</u> of the idea that those who make speeches on important matters of state are not necessarily guided by selfish or vain motives. Diodotus does not share the view that consulting often on important affairs

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[13] Cf. A.W. Gomme, <u>A Historical Commentary on Thucydides</u>, Volume II, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956, on III.41, p.313.

[14] Christopher Bruell, "Thucydides' View of Athenian Imperialism", p.16.

is a bad thing, and he does not blame those who wish to debate the "business of the Mytilenaeans" again (III.42.1).

For Diodotus, "haste and anger", two things that Cleon advocates in his speech, are most contrary to good counsel, as "one is ever accompanied with madness and [the other with want of education and narrowness of judgement]. And whosoever maintaineth that words are not instructors to deeds, either he is not wise or doth it upon some private interest of his own" (III.42.2-.3). Diodotus thus turns the table on Cleon - he suggests that Cleon is either stupid or a rogue. But by doing so, Diodotus has adopted the tactics used by Cleon - in assailing Cleon he has lowered himself to the level of the demagogue. In charging Cleon with attacking the motives and integrity of his political rivals, he attacks Cleon's motives and integrity. [15]

The second deception by Diodotus that is important for our consideration involves his discussion about giving good counsel to a democracy such as Athens. Diodotus contrasts Athens with "a wise state" which

> ought not either to add unto, or, on the other side, to derogate from, the honour of him that giveth good advice, nor yet punish, nay, nor disgrace, the man whose counsel they receive not. And then, neither would he that lighteth on good advice deliver anything against his own conscience, out of ambition of further honour and to please the auditory, nor he that doth not, covet

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[15] Cf. Clifford Orwin, "Democratic Deliberation and Distrust: A Lesson from Thucydides" in The American Scholar, Volume 53, Number 3, 1984, p. 323.

> thereupon by gratifying the people some way or other that he also may endear them (III.42.11-.12).

Athens does the contrary, however, according to Diodotus. Further, Diodotus remarks that in Athens, the reputation of the speaker and the perceived purity of his motives are more important than the substance of the advice itself. Trust in the motives of trustworthy political leaders would appear to be crucial for the proper functioning of democracy, and Diodotus is clearly aware that it is the trust he must gain of the Athenian demos to be persuasive. At this point in his speech however, he says something rather remarkable: that "he that gives the most sound advice is forced by lying to get himself believed" (III.43.2). Diodotus tells the demos that he must lie to them to benefit the city, and then, as we shall see, he does just that.

Diodotus proceeds to move on to the "business of the Mytilenaeans" (III.44). Diodotus states that the question should not be, if the Athenians are to be wise, about the injury done to Athens, but what the wisest thing to do is in accordance with their own interests. "For how great soever be their fault, yet I would never advise to have them put to death unless it be for our profit, [nor yet would I pardon them,] though they were pardonable, unless it be good for the commonwealth" (III.44.3-.4). Diodotus purports to argue from the perspective of self-interest or expediency rather than justice - from the beginning of this part of the speech, he argues that what is important is not what Mytilene deserves in terms of punishment, but rather - what is in the interest of Athens. Further, he rebuffs Cleon's point that in laying waste

to Mytilene, both justice and self-interest are combined - he holds that these "can never possibly be found together in the same thing" at III.47.7. [16] This speech made by Diodotus would appear to be in a sense more ruthless than Cleon's: whereas Cleon argued in terms of justice and expediency, Diodotus purports to reject justice altogether. But even though he purports to reject considerations of justice, he manages to put forward an argument for the preservation of Mytilene, and he does say that since the majority of Mytilenaeans did not commit a crime it therefore would be unjust for the Athenians to execute them (III.47.3). [17] Diodotus' speech is not what it appears to be on the surface, then: despite what he says at the outset, he does argue in a way that justice does indeed have a place. While Cleon has made Diodotus argue on his terms of expediency by rousing some of the uglier passions of the demos, Diodotus takes the argument a step further by apparently rejecting all claims of justice in order to gain the trust of the Athenians. This is a great accomplishment, for Diodotus in his sophistication is the type of man that Cleon had just attacked, and the type described in Thucydides' subsequent accounts of the revolutions in Corcyra,

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[16] Warner and Orwin translate this passage slightly differently, and more in keeping with Diodotus' argument: "...this is not a case where such a combination is at all possible [emphasis added]". Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Translated by Rex Warner with an Introduction and Notes by M.I. Finley, London, Penguin, 1972; Clifford Orwin, "The Just and the Advantageous: The Case of the Mytilenaian Debate", p. 488.

[17] Cf. Leo Strauss, The City and Man, p.234.

"He that was fierce was always trusty, and he that contraried such a one was suspected" (III.82.11).

Diodotus argues that the current debate is about the future rather than the present. Whereas Cleon had contended that it would be in Athens' interests to put the Mytilenaeans to death "in that it will keep the rest from rebelling" (III.44.5), Diodotus rejects this line of argument. Diodotus allows that Cleon's speech is specious because it fits in with the demos' angry passions concerning the Mytilenaeans; however, as Diodotus says, the assembly is not a law court (cf. I.73) where it is appropriate to consider the equitable, but rather a political assembly to consider what is advantageous, or in Athenian self-interest (III.44.7).

What follows is certainly one of the great moments in Thucydides' work, Diodotus' discussion of the death penalty and human nature (III.45), the central part of his speech. It is important to remember, however, that Diodotus is making this speech in a certain situation, that is - an open assembly at Athens, and it is designed to gain the acceptance of the Athenian demos in light of what Cleon had said previously. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the speech are very important regarding the themes of power and justice in the context of Thucydides' account of the War.

The argument that Diodotus makes against carrying out the destruction of Mytilene is based upon a rejection of the idea that capital

punishment can deter all transgressions, and this view is tied to his view of human nature.

> They have it by nature, both men and cities, to commit offences; nor is there any law that can prevent it. For men have gone over all degrees of punishment, augmenting them still, in hope to be less annoyed by malefactors. And it is likely that gentler punishments were inflicted of old even upon the most heinous crimes; but that in tract of time, men continuing to transgress, they were extended afterwards to the taking away of life; and yet they still transgress. And therefore, either some greater terror than death must be devised, or death will not be enough for coercion. For poverty will always add boldness to necessity; and wealth, covetousness to pride and contempt. And the other [middle] fortunes, they also through human passion, according as they are severally subject to some insuperable one or other, impel men to danger. But hope and desire work this effect in all estates. And this as the leader, that as the companion; this contriving the enterprise, that suggesting the success are the cause of most crimes that are committed, and being least discerned, are more mischievous than evils seen. Besides these two, fortune also puts men forward as much as anything else. For presenting herself sometimes unlooked for, she provoketh some to adventure, though not provided as they ought for the purpose, and especially cities because they venture for the greatest matters, as liberty and[18] dominion over others; and amongst a generality, everyone, though without reason, somewhat the more magnifies himself in particular. In a word, it is a thing impossible and of great simplicity to believe when human nature is earnestly bent to do a thing that by force of law or any other danger it can be diverted (III.45.4-.14).

The death penalty is ineffective according to Diodotus because human nature, physis, contains in it the roots of transgression. No human law,

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[18] There is a disagreement in the texts here. Crawley translates this as "freedom or empire [emphasis added]". Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, the Crawley Translation, Revised, with an Introduction by T.E. Wick, New York, The Modern Library, 1982.

nomos, can keep man restrained once he has decided upon a course of action.[19] Boldness, covetousness, pride and contempt are fuelled "through human passion", and this is what impels men, and cities even more so, into danger. Hope and desire "work this effect in all estates" - and this leads men towards the most incredible disasters through daring adventure. Sometimes fortune encourages humans on, as it does occasionally aid man, but it can be a real burden for cities, as it can lead some into adventures for which they are not prepared - especially in matters of empire which are "the greatest matters". The point Diodotus is attempting to make regarding the death penalty and the destruction of Mytilene is that Cleon's policy will not deter any future revolts; passionate and daring human nature will always lead subject states to rebel, and the example of the death penalty will not serve as a deterrent.

Although as has been noted above that this speech is designed to serve immediate political purposes, Diodotus' arguments about human nature do transcend the particular limits of the debate. When entire cities come to be guided by these natural impulses as Diodotus understands them, and are unable to maintain any kind of self-control, he is saying that they become even more susceptible to disaster than individuals, as the objects of cities desires are "the greatest matters, as liberty and dominion over others"

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[19] See the discussion of physis and nomos in W.K.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Volume III, pp. 55-134, especially pp.87-88.

- they involve questions of empire. As the objects of entire cities' passions and daring - empire - these "greatest things" foreshadow the grandest of imperial adventures by the Athenians in the War, the Sicilian expedition, when all Athenians "fell in love with the enterprise" (VI.24.4).

The argument made by Diodotus about human nature and how this relates to politics gives us a picture of a very bleak world in international affairs. Hubris, always tempting humans to desire more than might be considered reasonable, always driving man to get carried away with triumphs and thinking up grander schemes, leads individuals and especially cities into disaster. Diodotus uses this human trait to help explain Athenian imperialism and the Mytilenaean revolt - thus getting carried away with success leads men to be controlled by their passions rather than by their reason. Both the Athenians, drunk on their power and anger which leads them to hubris, and the Mytilenaeans in their weakness, are caught up in a very ugly world of international politics. Human nature as Diodotus understands it makes revolt from empire and imperialism inevitable.

Diodotus advises the Athenians that they should not have too much confidence in the effectiveness of capital punishment for keeping allied cities in line. He argues for allowing rebels to atone for their mistakes while their city is still able to come to terms in one piece and to continue to pay tribute. As Diodotus holds that such revolts cannot be stopped completely because of hubristic human nature, he suggests that Cleon's

policy is unwise as it will only make potential rebel cities in the future prepare better for revolt, and that cities who are in the process of rebelling will hold out to the bitter end, as under Cleon's policy they are to be given no chance of repentance. Diodotus argues it certainly is not in Athens' interests to retake a ruined city that will be unable to continue paying the tribute upon which Athens' strength depends against her enemies. Diodotus then suggests an alternative course for Athens in the maintenance of her empire:

> We are not then to be exact judges in the punition of offenders but to look rather how by their moderate punishment we may have our confederate cities, such as they may be able to pay us tribute; and not think to keep them in awe by the rigour of laws but by the providence of our own actions. But we to the contrary, when we recover a city which, having been free and held under our obedience by force hath revolted justly, think now that we ought to inflict some cruel punishment upon them. Whereas we ought rather not mightily to punish a free city revolted but mightily to look to it before it revolt and to prevent the intention of it, but when we have overcome them, to lay the fault upon as few as we can (III.46.6-.8).

This advice on how to keep the confederation together is very different than the kind based on fear and terror that Cleon gave. Indeed, Diodotus argues for a policy based upon "the providence of our own actions", - he argues for keeping the alliance together by the good will of the allies towards Athens as a good leader. Diodotus does of course recognize that force is necessary (III.46.8), but prefers "moderate punishment" and "upon as few as we can".

The policy that Diodotus advocates is strikingly similar to the policy that Cyrus advocates for keeping his new empire together in Xenophon's Cyropaedia. Cyrus says,

> ...for, while I think it is a great thing to have won an empire, it is a still a greater thing to preserve it after it has been won. For to win falls often to the lot of one who has shown nothing but daring; but to win and hold - that is no longer a possibility without the exercise of self-control, temperance, and unflagging care. Recognizing all this, we ought to practise virtue even more than we did before we secured these advantages...But that which is next in importance after the favour of the gods we must get for ourselves - namely, we must claim the right to rule over our subjects only on the ground that we are their betters (VII.V.77-.78). [20]

Diodotus moves on in chapter 47 to argue further against Cleon's policy. The enemies of Athens would be the beneficiaries of the policy of Cleon, as it would involve killing the Mytilenaean demos - the Athenian fifth column in the War when the oligarchs decided to force the city to revolt.

> But if you shall destroy the commonalty of the Mytilenaeans, which did neither partake of the revolt and as soon as they were armed presently delivered the city into your hands, you shall first do unjustly to kill such as have done you service, and you shall effect a work besides which the great men do everywhere most desire (III.47.3).

If Cleon's policy is chosen, even if the demos is made to rebel by the oligarchs, they will hold out to the end of the revolt, "you having foreshown

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[20] Xenophon, Cyropaedia With an English Translation by Walter Miller in Two Volumes, Volume II, London, William Heineman Limited, 1961. All citations to the Cyropaedia are from this translation. I have used the standard form of reference: book, paragraph and where necessary, sentence (e.g. V.IV.37).

them by the example that both the guilty and not guilty must undergo the same punishment" (III.47.4).

Diodotus finishes his speech by advising the Athenians not to give into "compassion or lenity" (III.48.1). He advocates trying those whom Paches had sent to Athens as those being potentially guilty, and allowing the rest of the Mytilenaeans to live in their own city. He tells the Athenians that his policy is both good for the future and worrisome for the enemy, as the city that "consulteth wisely" is a more formidable enemy than one that runs into action "unadvisedly" (III.48.3).

The Athenians vote on the motions of Cleon and Diodotus, and the policy of Diodotus is victorious, but only barely. The Athenian trireme reaches Mytilene just in time to prevent the massacre. Upon a motion put forward by Cleon, the more than thousand Mytilenaeans who were sent to Athens by Paches for being responsible for the revolt were put to death. The Mytilenaean <u>demos</u> is spared, but not without the efforts of the extraordinary Diodotus. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, concerning the Melian Dialogue, there is no room for the thoughts of someone like Diodotus in the arguments and action of the Athenians at Melos, and the full meaning of expediency in foreign affairs is brought to its zenith. As has been noted above, this is the one and only appearance of Diodotus in Thucydides' account of the War, and the conduct of Athens is all downhill from here.

If Thucydides is known to us as a realist for his views concerning international affairs, then the Melian Dialogue deserves its reputation as an incident of arch-realism par excellence. What might be called the Athenian power politics thesis, that "whereas they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get" (V.89.2), is the theme of the Dialogue. The ruthlessness of the Dialogue is amplified by the fact that any notions of justice are completely left out of the considerations concerning the fate of Melos (V.90.1). Twelve years of war have passed from the time of the Mytilenaean Debate to the Melian Dialogue, and Thucydides' judgement that "war...is a most violent master" that "conformeth most men's passions to the present occasion" (III.82.5) has surely affected the Athenian view of politics, especially her views about the empire. Thucydides does not tell us what he thinks about the slaughter and enslavement of the Melians that is the result of this incident; however, we should keep in mind some of his comments about other massacres in his account of the War (see VII.29-.30). But so far as teaching us a lesson in political sobriety, few other passages from any other source can match the Dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians in Book Five of The Peloponnesian War.

In the summer of the sixteenth year of the War, the Athenians set sail for the island of Melos. They had a considerable force with them: thirty galleys of their own, six from Chios and two from Lesbos. These ships

carried twelve hundred hoplites, three hundred archers, and twenty archers on horseback from Athens; and about fifteen hundred hoplites from their confederates and islanders. Thucydides tells us that the Melians were a colony of the Spartans, and that at first they wanted to remain neutral in the War - refusing to be subject to Athens like the other islands in the Aegean Sea. But after the Athenians began to lay waste to their land, they entered into open war with Athens.

Before they started laying waste to the land of the Melians, however, the Athenians sent their generals Cleomedes, son of Lycomedes, and Tisias, son of Tisimachus, to talk to the Melians. The Melians refused to allow these Athenians to speak before the demos, "but commanded them to deliver their message before the magistrates and the few" (V.84.6; cf.II.12.2).

The Athenians propose not to make long speeches to the Melians and have the Melians make similarly long speeches in response, but rather each will "answer you also to every particular, not in a set speech, but presently interrupting us whensoever anything shall be said by us which shall seem unto you to be otherwise" (V.85.1). The Melians have no objection to a "leisurely debate" (V.86.1); however, the Melians believe that the Athenians are at Melos to be participants and judges of the Dialogue, and as such, that there can be only two outcomes: war if the Melians prove to have the superior argument and refuse to surrender, or, slavery (V.86.2).

The Athenians state baldly that what matters is not suspicions about the future, but rather, "what is present and before your eyes, how to save your city from destruction" (V.87.1). The starting point of the Dialogue is, then, the presence of the Athenian forces. The Melians agree (V.88) to the Dialogue "upon the point of our safety" and the Dialogue thus proceeds along the lines the Athenians proposed.

The Athenians state in V.89 that the Melians must debate what is feasible, not what is just, for the Athenians state that justice between two cities is only a possibility when the power of the two is equal. Otherwise, the stronger city gets as much as it can, and the weaker city yields to what it can get.

> As we therefore will not, for our parts, with fair pretences, as, that having defeated the Medes, our reign is therefore lawful, or that we come against you for injury done, make a long discourse without being believed; so would we have you also not expect to prevail by saying either that you therefore took not our parts because you were a colony of the Lacedaemonians or that you have done us no injury. But out of those things which we both of us do really think, let us go through with that which is feasible, both you and we knowing that in human disputation justice is then only agreed on when the necessity is equal; whereas they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get. (V.89)

Thus any notion of justice is considered irrelevant: self-interest and power politics in their purest form are the order of the day. The Melians state this quite succinctly: "you put the point of profit in the place of justice" (V.90.1).

The Melians in any case argue that there is perhaps an interest that is common to both the Athenians and Melians alike - that is, that it is good for those who fall in to danger to be able to "plead reason and equity" (V.90.1). This is in the interests of the Athenians, say the Melians, "forasmuch as you shall else give an example unto others of the greatest revenge that can be taken if you chance to miscarry" (V.90.2) - the Athenians may lose their empire some day and then their former subjects will seek revenge on Athens for what they did to the weaker cities. But the Athenians reject this argument. Characteristically hubristic of the Athenians (see 1.70; cf. V.45, VI.24), they say if "our dominion should cease" (V.91.1) [21] - they do not fear the prospect of facing their conqueror for reasons having to do with "reason and equity". Rather, they do fear being conquered by their own subjects. The Athenians are at Melos to secure their own empire and as they say, "to confer about the saving of your city" (V.91.4). The Athenians claim that they would rule over the Melians without oppressing them, and preserve Melos to the profit of both cities. The Melians ask how it could be profitable for both of them if they are to serve the Athenians and the Athenians are to rule them (V.92). The

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[21] There is some disagreement among the translations here. Crawley translates this "The end of our empire, if end it should" and Warner "even assuming that our empire does come to an end". Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, The Crawley Translation, Revised, with an Introduction by T.E. Wick, New York, Modern Library, 1982; Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, the Warner Translation.

Athenians respond by saying that the Melians will benefit by obeying in that they will save themselves from being destroyed, and the Athenians will benefit by the profit Melos will bring Athens as a subject state.

The Melians then bring up the possibility of neutrality and being friends with Athens (V.94). The Athenians turn down this request immediately. "No. For your enmity doth not so much hurt us as your friendship will be an argument of our weakness and your hatred of our power amongst those we have rule over" (V.95). Thus the Athenians recognize that their empire is based on power and fear, not good will. Good will by Athens towards her subject states, they claim, is a sign of weakness, whereas any fear found in Athenian allies is seen as a sign of Athenian power. This is basically the thesis put forward by Cleon in the Mytilenaean Debate:

> For it is natural to men to contemn those that observe them and to have in admiration such as will not give them way...I maintain that you ought not to alter your former decree nor to offend in any of these three most disadvantageous things to empire, pity, delight in plausible speeches, and lenity (III.39.9-III.40.3; cf. V.97).

The Melians respond by asking if that is the way the subjects of Athens "measure equity" (V.96.2), that distinctions are not made between those who were never subjects of Athens and those who were Athenian colonists or colonial rebels that have been subsequently conquered by Athens. In doing so, the Melians bring up a topic that they are denied in the Dialogue - the idea of equity (cf.V.90.1). At the Congress at Sparta

(1.66-.88) the Athenians make the point that only when weaker cities begin calculating their own interest do they begin to bring up questions of equity - "a thing which no man that had the occasion to achieve anything by strength ever so far preferred as to divert him from his profit" (1.76.5).

Chapter 97 contains one of the clearer statements about Athenian rule over her empire in Thucydides' account of the War.

> ...For they think they have reason on their side, both the one sort and the other, and that such as are subdued are subdued by force, and such as are forborne are so through our fear. So that by subduing you, besides the extending of our dominion over so many more subjects, we shall assume it the more over those we had before, especially being masters of the sea, and you islanders, and weaker (except you can get the victory) than others whom we have subdued already (V.97).

There is not a difference, then, between the two types of cities mentioned in V.96 concerning what is equitable - rather the cities that are subjects in the Athenian empire are so because of the superior power of Athens. Those cities that do preserve their independence do so because they are strong. By subduing Melos, the Athenians will not only increase the size of their empire, but also increase their control over it by demonstrating their superior power. This show of strength is necessary if Athens is to maintain the respect of her subjects through fear.[22] The Athenians have created the hostile sentiments in their allies and have given such a fearful notion of her imperial policy, that it is her obligation to subdue and

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[22] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, p.288.

conquer, especially island states, as Athens is a sea power. As such, it is important that the Melians as islanders, and not the strongest island city at that, be ruled by Athens.

The Melians respond by saying that if the Athenians proceed in enslaving Melos, they will turn those cities now neutral into enemies by making them think that the Athenians will soon turn their arms on them. The Melians argue that this will make more enemies for Athens than they already have - it forces others against their will to become enemies of Athens (V.98). The Athenians are not worried about enemies on the continent: they repeat again that they are a sea power, and this makes them concerned with islanders like Melos who are not in the Athenian empire, or with already subject islanders who do not want to be subjects to Athenian rule, who may "by unadvised courses, put both themselves and us into apparent danger" (V.99.2). The Athenians also remark or bring up the idea of "liberty" (V.99.1) when they speak of the continental cities as opposed or distinguished from the islanders who are in servitude to the Athenians. The Melians consider that this distinction between liberty and servitude in the Athenian empire forces them to avoid being base and cowardly by "encounter anything whatsoever rather than suffer ourselves to be brought into bondage" (V.100). The Athenians do not object to the Melians in their

discussion of liberty - for it is obviously in a city's interest to have liberty as opposed to being a subject in an empire. [23]

The Athenians deny that the Melians would be base or cowards if they do not encounter "anything whatsoever" in standing up to the Athenians. If the Melians "advise rightly" (V.101.1), they will not be base or cowards,

> For you have not in hand a match of valour upon equal terms, wherein to forfeit your honour, but rather a consultation upon your safety that you resist not such as be so far your overmatches (V.101.2).

In other words, this is not a question of testing the Melians' martial blood in terms of honour, but rather a question of intelligence. If the Melians are smart, they will avoid war with the much more powerful Athenians, and endeavour to save themselves and their city.

At this point, the Melians fall back on hope (V.102), as they believe that "in matter of war, the event is sometimes otherwise than according to the difference of number in sides; and that if we yield presently, all our hope is lost; whereas if we hold out, we have yet a hope to keep ourselves up".

The cynicism of the Athenians [24] comes through in response to the Melians hopeful illusions. Hope is an expensive indulgence for those who do not have power to fall back on. The Athenians warn the Melians,

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[23] Cf. Leo Strauss, The City and Man, p. 186.

[24] Cf. J.H. Finley, Thucydides, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1942, p. 210.

> Nor be you like unto many men, who, though they may presently save themselves by human means, will yet, when upon pressure of the enemy their most apparent hopes fail them, betake themselves to blind ones, as divination, oracles, and other such things which with hopes destroy men (V.103.4).

The Athenian warning to the Melians not to rely on divination, oracles and other such things in times of war lest they be destroyed foreshadows the performance of the Athenian general Nicias on the Sicilian expedition. Although Thucydides admires Nicias, he "having regulated all his life in accordance with what has been considered virtue" (VII.86.9), he does find fault with him, "for he was addicted to superstition and observations of that kind somewhat too much" (VII.50.6).

The Melians acknowledge that it is difficult for them to oppose Athenian power and fortune as they are not on equal terms of strength (V.104.1). In any case, the Melians say they will stand up to the Athenians, because they believe that they are not inferior in fortune to the Athenians as they have the gods on their side - "because we stand innocent against men unjust" (V.104.2), and further, as for strength, "what is wanting in us will be supplied by our league with the Lacedaemonians". The Spartans will oblige the Melians, they believe, because of they are honourable, and because they are kinsmen. Thus the questions of baseness and cowardice in the face of battle as raised by the Melians in V.100 and changed by the Athenians in V.101 to acting "rightly" comes down to the question of whether the Melians are correct or wise in their hope in the gods on the one hand and their hope

in the Spartans on the other. The Melians say they "are confident, not altogether so much without reason as you think" (V.104.3).

The Athenians' response in chapter 105 is as bold and black a statement about imperialism as one might find anywhere: it is a statement, as de Romilly suggests, "what we might call [imperialism's] "basic essence"" and "it may be to this circumstance that we must attribute a part of the excessively brutal realism of the Athenians". [25] It is this normative dimension of realism that scarcely receives enough attention in contemporary academic study, though it certainly should [26]: in insisting on the primacy of power over justice in international affairs, it is necessary to see where this line of thought takes us when the argument is taken to its furthest limits. This is not to say that questions of power should be left out of investigations and debates about conduct in international affairs - a prophet without a sword will not last long in this turbulent world - but it is important to understand the limits of a theory, in this case realism, before one advocates putting it into practice. The results, as we shall see, can be disastrous.

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[25] Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, p.297.

[26] See Stephen Forde, "Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli" in Journal of Politics, Volume 54, Number 2, May 1992, pp. 372-393.

The Athenians believe that they have as much to expect from the gods as the Melians do - for as they say,

> As for the favour of the gods, we expect to have it as well as you; neither in what we claim nor what we do are we outside of what man thinks about the gods and what he wishes for himself. For of the gods we think according to the common opinion; and of men, that for certain by necessity of nature they will everywhere reign over such as they be too strong for. Neither did we make this law nor are we the first that use it made; but as we found it, and shall leave it to posterity for ever, so also we use it, knowing that you likewise, and others that should have the same power which we have, would do the same (V.105.1-.3).

Thus the Athenians say that humans, "by necessity of nature", rule over all that they are stronger than. The Athenians did not make up this law of nature nor were they the first ones to act in accordance with it. This law, the Athenians claim, is "for ever" and universal, so the Athenians will use it, as "knowing that you likewise, and others that should have the same power which we have, would do the same".

It is very difficult to argue with the Athenians on this point from their perspective - that is, that the powerful are the ones who decide what is just and may do as they see fit. Indeed, this is what ends up happening at Melos. To argue against this type of realism, one is required to advance the proposition that ethics are applicable to international affairs - but this is precisely what the Athenians deny - that "in human disputation justice is then only agreed on when the necessity is equal" (V.89.2). Of course, the

perfect objection to this is that the balance of power as justice is not justice at all, or what is in the common good.

As concerning the Melian hope that the Spartans will come to their aid, the Athenians bless their innocent minds, but they do not envy them in their folly. For the Spartans are, in their relations with each other and in respect for their constitution, "for the most part generous" (V.105.6). But in respect to others, the Spartans most apparently of all men, hold the honourable to be that which pleases them, and that which is just that which profits them.

The Melians believe that this very opinion of the Spartans, that they act on behalf of their own interests, is to their advantage (V.106). From this point on in the Dialogue then, both the Athenians and Melians agree to talk only about self-interest as opposed to the divine or just.[27] The Melians hold that the Spartans will not betray their own colony, Melos, lest they lose the confidence of their friends or allies in the War and thus benefit their enemies. The Athenians answer "that what is profitable must also be safe, and that which is just and honourable must be performed with danger, which commonly the Lacedaemonians are least willing of all men to undergo [for others]" (V.107). Thus the Athenians state what is obvious to all except for the Melians: the Spartans are not gamblers - they are very cautious and they do not hurry into war (cf. I.80-.84;I.18) - they will not come to the aid of the

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[27] Cf. Leo Strauss, The City and Man, p.188.

Melians for it is not in their interest as it is not safe, and further, it goes against their character.

The Melians counter by saying that the Spartans "will undertake danger for us rather than for any other" because the Melians and Spartans are the same kin, and - purely out of self-interest for the Spartans - Melos is near the Peloponnese so they might carry on the War better (V.108). The Athenians reply that it is not the good will of a prospective ally that counts in war, but rather those means of fighting that they excel in that attracts allies (V.109). The Spartans, the Athenians claim, consider this point more than any others. They, "out of diffidence in their own forces" (V.109.2), take many of their allies along with them when they attack a neighbour, and the Athenians believe that it is very unlikely that, with the Athenians being masters of the sea (cf. I.93), that the Spartans will make the voyage to the island of Melos. The Melians remain hopeful. They argue that the Spartans may send others, and that the Cretan Sea is wide, so that it is more difficult for those who are masters of the sea to intercept others than it is for those who wish to slip through (V.110.1). Even if this course fails, the Spartans may turn their forces against Athenian territory or Athenian confederates not already invaded by the Spartan general Brasidas (V.110.2). Thus, the Athenians would have to trouble themselves "more about a territory that you have nothing to do withal, but about your own and your confederates" (V.110.3).

The Athenians say that an invasion is a possibility and that it has happened before, but that the Melians should not be so ignorant not to recognize that the Athenians have never yet given up a siege operation because of fear of others (V.111.1-.2). Further, and more importantly,

> But we observe that, whereas you said you would consult of your safety, you have not yet in all this discourse said anything which a man relying on could hope to be preserved by; the strongest arguments you use are but future hopes; and your present power is too short to defend you against the forces already arranged against you (V.111.2).

The Melians' argument is based on hope and not any real considerations of power: hope or faith in the gods, and hope that the Spartans will come to their aid. The strongest of the points made by the Melians are really very weak - they are not based on solid calculations of interest as they agreed to at the beginning of the Dialogue - and as was mentioned before, hope can be a very extravagant luxury if one does not have solid power to fall back upon. Indeed, this hopeful attitude in the face of a much stronger power goes against what many of the great Athenian statesmen had to say about putting principles beyond the scope of reality in politics.[28] Pericles tells the Athenians that "a man knows what he doth" as "he trusteth less to hope, which is of force only in uncertainties, and more to judgement upon certainties, wherein there is a more sure foresight" (II.62.7). Recalling the speech of Diodotus in the Mytilenaean Debate, we are told that

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[28] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, pp. 291-292.

> ...hope and desire work this effect in all estates. And this as the leader, that as the companion; this contriving the enterprise, that suggesting the success are the cause of most crimes that are committed, and being least discerned, are more mischievous than evils seen (III.45.10-.11).

Thucydides himself, commenting on the Athenian state of mind on the return of the Athenian generals Pythodorus, Sophocles, and Eurymedon from Sicily, tells us that

> So great was their fortune at that time that they thought nothing could cross them, but that they might have achieved both easy and hard enterprises with great and slender forces alike. The cause whereof was the unreasonable prosperity of most of their designs, subministering strength unto their hope (IV.65.5-.6)

Thucydides further remarks in light of the success of the Spartan general Brasidas in capturing Amphiopolis, and the extreme desire of the cities under Athenian rule to be freed,

> For they thought they might do it boldly, falsely estimating the power of the Athenians to be less than afterwards it appeared, and making a judgement of it according to [blind] wilfulness rather than safe forecast; it being the fashion of men, what they wish to be true to admit even upon an ungrounded hope, and what they wish not, with a magistral kind of arguing to reject (IV.108.4).

The Athenians conclude the Dialogue with a warning and some advice to the Melians.

> For many, when they have forseen into what dangers they were entering, have nevertheless been so overcome by that forcible word dishonour that that which is but called dishonour hath caused them to fall willingly into immedicable calamities, and so to draw upon themselves really, by their own madness, a greater dishonour than could have befallen them by fortune. Which you, if you deliberate wisely, will take heed of, and not

> think shame to submit to a most potent city, and that upon so reasonable conditions as of league and of enjoying your own under tribute; and seeing choice given you of war or safety, do not out of peevishness take the worse. For such do take the best course who, though they give no way to their equals, yet do fairly accommodate to their superiors, and towards their inferiors use moderation. Consider of it, therefore, whilst we stand off; and have often in your mind that you deliberate of your country, which is to be happy or miserable in and by this one consultation (V.111.4-.7).

The Athenians tell the Melians not to be overcome by honour when looking into a dangerous situation - they urge the Melians to "deliberate wisely" and not to think it shameful to give way to the more powerful Athenian forces. The Athenians offer "reasonable conditions", they say, of alliance on a tribute paying basis and enjoyment of their own regime. The decision is between war or safety - and the Athenians tell the Melians that those who choose the best course stand up to their equals, defer to their superiors and are moderate to the weaker.

The Melians do not take the advice of the Athenians. They will not give up their liberty which they have enjoyed for seven hundred years, but rather, "trusting to the fortune by which the gods have preserved it hitherto" and with the hope of aid from the Spartans, they will do their best to defend themselves (V.112.1-.2). The Melians offer the Athenians friendship, neutrality in the war, and request that the Athenians leave Melos upon the making of an agreement (V.112.3). The Athenians reply, summing up well the Melian position,

> You are the only men, as it seemeth to us, by this consultation, that think future things more certain than things seen, and behold things doubtful, though desire to have them true, as if they were already come to pass. As you attribute and trust the most unto the Lacedaemonians, and to fortune and hopes, so will you be the most deceived (V.113.2-.3).

The Athenian generals, finding that the Melians would not submit, begin to lay siege to the city, and to blockade it by land and sea. After reinforcements come from Athens under the command of Philocrates, son of Demeas, Melos comes under intense siege. Some Melians within the city wished to give up, and this combined with the pressure made on the city by the Athenians, makes the Melians surrender "to the discretion of the Athenians, who slew all the men of military age, made slaves of the women and children, and inhabited the place with a colony sent thither afterwards of five hundred men of their own" (V.116.5).

As terrible as the fate of the Melians is, it is not one that can be considered tragic. The Melians are reduced in the Dialogue to base their safety on hope and faith alone - not any meaningful considerations of power; thus the Melians are defeated in the argument before they are defeated in deed. In doing so, the Melians showed a real lack of judgement in their resistance to any concessions to the Athenians. The fate of the Melians is not then an incidence of tragedy since the Melians could have preserved themselves - it is instead an incidence of real political miscalculation - and perhaps even a hint of hubris is present in the Melian words and deeds in so far as the Melians overestimate their position relative to the Athenians,

and are content to rely on faith and hope rather than on what was plain for their reason to apprehend: the presence of a very powerful adversary.

This is not to say that the Athenians are justified in doing what they did to the Melians. To repeat, the relationship between Athens and Melos, the Athenians tell us, is one based on power, and the Athenians reject any considerations of justice lest there be two equally strong cities - but this is not justice in any meaningful sense of the word. The Athenians "exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get" (V.89.2); the cities of their empire know that Athens refrains from conquest only when they believe themselves weaker than their opponent (V.95). While Thucydides does not comment on the terrible end to Melos in chapter 116 as he does when he reflects on the butchery of Mycalessus (VII.29-.30), this is because he is less concerned with the particular incident as he is with the overall phenomenon of imperialism [29], and the never ending conquests that accompany it. Furthermore, it is one thing for the Athenians to claim that they have observed that the strong rule where they can, that this is a law of nature that they did not make themselves, and quite another to say they will act in accordance with it (V.105). This extreme incidence of the rule of the stronger in international affairs, imperialism, is valid as a law of nature only for those that choose to follow it, and certainly we may choose to be exceptions to this rule. As de Romilly writes,

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[29] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, p. 308.

> The Athenians speak of necessity, and Thucydides seems to be trying to bring out a kind of automatic process which dragged imperialism from conquest to conquest and finally to defeat. Nevertheless, in equally late passages of his work, Thucydides also insists, when he talks about Pericles, on the beauty of Athenian imperialism, and on the possibilities of Athenian victory. It seems therefore that this necessity began by showing itself only as a temptation...Through the mistakes made by Cleon and Alcibiades, the forces holding Athens back on the fatal slope gradually disappear, until the only thing which remains is the almost mechanical pressure of imperialism, like an evil force gradually controlling everything [emphasis added] [30].

Suffice to say, the Athenians may well have captured part of the essence of international affairs in a descriptive sense, but their prescriptive policy of imperialism leaves much to be desired.

But while we can certainly criticize the Athenians on moral grounds in the Melian episode, it would be a mistake to believe that Thucydides believes that this is a political mistake made by the Athenians. The political error is made by the Melians, not the Athenians, in this incident - the Athenians do prevail after all. Further, to repeat what was said in the last chapter, rule over empire does require the use of force (cf. I.75).

In considering the Melian Dialogue, we can see imperial rule devoid of any moral content whatsoever, even without the claims to be worthy of rule over an empire as the Athenians claim at the Congress of Sparta (I.76). In the next chapter, on the Sicilian expedition, we shall see imperialism

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[30] Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, pp. 309-310.

inspired not so much by a cold-hearted, blackened realism, as by the greatest example of daring, self-indulgent use of power and hubris in Thucydides' account of the War, and the terrible consequences it has for Athens.

One cannot help but notice that the Melian Dialogue, where justice plays no part, is followed immediately in Thucydides account of the War by the Sicilian expedition by the Athenians in Book Six. It is tempting to conclude that the disastrous ending to the expedition for the Athenians is somehow linked to the injustice of the Athenians as displayed at Melos, but this may not be what Thucydides thought (II.65). Indeed, Thucydides believed that the Sicilian expedition was defensible. The reason for its failure, Thucydides explains, is that while Pericles told the Athenians that they would be successful in the War if they remained quiet and remained attentive to their navy, and if they sought no further dominion and did nothing to jeopardize the safety of the city itself, they ignored this advice (II.65.10). The Athenian leaders after Pericles, Thucydides tells us,

> did contrary in all, and in such other things besides as seemed not to concern the war managed the state, according to their private ambitions and covetousness, perniciously both for themselves and their confederates. What succeeded well the honour and profit was to the city's detriment in the war...they that came after, being more equal amongst themselves and affecting everyone to be the chief, applied themselves to the people and let go the care of the commonwealth. From whence amongst many other errors, as was likely in a great and dominant city, proceeded also the voyage into Sicily, which was not so much upon mistaking those whom they went against as for want of knowledge in the senders of what was necessary for those that went the voyage. For through private quarrels about who should bear the greatest sway with the people they both abated the vigour of the army and then also first troubled the state at home with division (II.65.11-.20).

The most daring attempt at imperial expansion by the Athenians in the History then was not a failure because of its injustice, but rather because of

political mistakes made by the Athenians in Sicily and at home. However unjust we may think the Sicilian expedition, then, we must appreciate the fact that the failure of the Athenians has nothing to do with the vindication of justice over power in international affairs. Such a vindication of the cause of justice may well be what we would like to hear, but Thucydides recorded his History with "no fables" and knew that it would be "not delightful", but rather was "the truth of things done and which (according to the condition of humanity) may be done again, or at least their like" (1.22.5-.6).

Thucydides tells us in the first chapter of Book Six that the Athenians resolved to send out an expedition to Sicily, this time with greater forces than had been sent out with Laches and Eurymedon in 425. They wanted to conquer the whole island, if they could; but the Athenians, Thucydides tells us, were "for the most part ignorant both of the greatness of the island, and of the multitude of people", and that "they undertook a war not much less than the war against the Peloponessians" (VI.1.1). Though the island was very large in size and population, "the Athenians longed very much to send an army against it, out of a desire to bring it all under subjection, which was the true motive, but as having withal this fair pretext of aiding their kindred and new confederates" (VI.6.2; cf. VI.24; I.23.7-.8). Thucydides thus begins his account of the Sicilian expedition with a nod to some of those conditions which lead human beings into disaster: daring, self-indulgent uses of power,

desire and hubris [31]. These conditions have some of their roots in Greek religious ideas, often indicating exaggerated pride or self-confidence in oneself, leading to the most incredible daring, with the result being divine retribution for the transgressor. In Herodotus, Artabamus explains to Xerxes,

> Do you see how it is the living things that exceed others in size that the god strikes with lightning and will not let them show their grandeur, while the little ones do not itch the god into action? Do you see how it is always the greatest houses and the tallest trees that the god hurls his bolts upon? For the god loves to thwart whatever is greater than the rest. It is in this way that a great army may be destroyed by a small one; for once god has conceived jealousy against the great army, he may hurl fear upon it or his thunder, and it will perish in a way unworthy of itself. The god does not suffer pride in anyone but himself. Speed in everything begets failure, and from failure the penalties are wont to be severe. There is good in hesitation, though one may not see it at the time; later one will find it good (VII.10). [32]

As presented by Thucydides, these human conditions lose their religious grounding, and he presents them in the History as human failings or weaknesses. They become for Thucydides a secular way of explaining politics, especially as regards to the Sicilian expedition, where desire overreaches or goes beyond what is reasonable for the Athenians in terms of their desire and ability to conquer (cf. VI.1; VI.24), reaches the peak of

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[31] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, pp. 322-329.

[32] Herodotus, The History, translated by David Grene, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987. All references to Herodotus are made from this edition, using book and chapter where cited, e.g. VII.10.

exaltation in the departure of the Athenian fleet to Sicily (VI.31), and then is destroyed in a grand, terrible sequence of battles at Sicily (VII.87). The most extreme daring that Athens is known for, especially in foreign affairs, as the Corinthians say at the Congress at Sparta, reflects these conditions.

> [The Athenians] love innovation and are swift to devise and also to execute what they resolve on...They again are bold beyond their strength, adventurous above their own reason, and in danger hope still the best...They, when they overcome their enemies, advance the farthest and, when they are overcome by their enemies, fall off the least; and as for their bodies, they use them in the service of the commonwealth as if they were none of their own...For they alone both have and hope for at once whatsoever they conceive through their celerity in execution of what they once resolve on. And in this manner they labour and toil all the days of their lives. What they have, they have no leisure to enjoy for continual getting of more...(I.70.2-.14)

And as Thucydides himself remarks at VI.31.10, the Sicilian expedition was noteworthy not only for the

> strange boldness of the attempt and gloriousness of the show than it was for the excessive report of their number, for the length of the voyage, and for that it was undertaken with so vast future hopes in respect of their present power.

While the Athenians' true motive in sending out their forces to Sicily was to bring the entire island under their rule (VI.6.2), they did so under the "pretext of aiding their kindred and new confederates" (VI.6.2). Thucydides again distinguishes between what was the true cause of the Athenian actions from those that were publicly voiced, as remarked in I.23. Further, as we learn from Alcibiades in his speech at Sparta, this is only one stage of an Athenian imperial campaign that aimed beyond the conquest of Sicily, to

conquer the Italians, the dominion of and Carthage itself, and finally, "the dominion of all Greece" (VI.90.5).

In the spring of the seventeenth year of the War, an assembly is held in which it was decided to send sixty ships to Sicily under the absolute command of Alcibiades, Nicias, and Lamachus (VI.8.2). The Athenians were to aid the people of Egesta against the Selinuntians, to reestablish the Leontines if they had time, and, to order the affairs of Sicily in accordance with Athenian interests.

Five days later, the Athenians again assembled to consider how to get the fleet ready quickly and to discuss any further things the generals would need for the expedition. Nicias came forward wishing to speak against the Sicilian expedition, which he believed was an attempt to conquer all of Sicily under small and superficial pretences (VI.8.4). The speech of Nicias at this occasion is remarkable both for its diagnosis of the Athenian designs on Sicily, and for voicing a strong opinion against it.

Nicias begins his speech by bringing up the question of whether it is wise to embark on the Sicilian expedition at all (VI.9.1). That Nicias can do this certainly says something about the importance that he does carry in Athens at the time, in spite of the fact that he loses the debate. Even bringing up the question for a second hearing in the assembly might well be interpreted as questioning the will of the people, and presumably, as

censurable on similar grounds to treason [33]. Nicias remarks that on this "so weighty an affair", it would be an "impertinent war" to rely on "the credit of strangers" and "upon a short deliberation" (VI.9.1).

Nicias acknowledges that he will gain honour by the expedition, and that he does not think much of the danger involved to his own person (VI.9.2). Nicias remarks that

> (not but that I think him [an equally good citizen] that hath regard also to his own person and estate; for such a man especially will desire the public to prosper for his own sake): but as I have never spoken heretofore, so nor now will I speak anything that is against my conscience, for gaining to myself a pre-eminence of honour: but that only which I apprehend for the best (VI.9.2).

Nicias clearly represents something in Athens more from the Periclean era rather than the present. Nicias recognizes the power and the dynamism of democratic Athens, but would like to be able to control it to some degree, and he is content to subordinate his honour to that of Athens, whereas the situation with Alcibiades is quite different. Aristotle later wrote in the Nicomachean Ethics that

> We see also that under this [political] science come those faculties which are most highly esteemed; e.g. the arts of war, of property management, and of public speaking...For even if the good of the community coincides with that of the individual, it is clearly a greater and more perfect thing to achieve and preserve that of a community; for while it is desirable to secure what is good in the case of an individual, to do so in the case of a people or a state is something finer and more sublime (I.ii)

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[33] Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War: The Complete Hobbes Translation with Notes and a New Introduction by David Grene, p. 384, fn.

and further that

> we think that Pericles and others like him are prudent, because they can envisage what is good for themselves and for people in general; we consider that this quality belongs to those who understand the management of households or states (VI.v; cf. Thucydides, II.65). [34]

Indeed, the changes in the Athenian democracy in terms of its political leadership, from men like Pericles to someone like Alcibiades, were for Thucydides the main cause of the Athenian defeat (II.65). The disunity of Athens after the death of Pericles thus serves as a counter to Thucydides' admiration of Athens, as he tells us in his assessment of Pericles:

> For as long as he was in authority in the city in time of peace, he governed the same with moderation and was a faithful watchman of it; and in his it was at the greatest. And after the war was on foot, it is manifest that he therein also foresaw what it could do...he told them that if they would be quiet and look to their navy, and during this war seek no further dominion nor hazard the city itself, they should then have the upper hand. But they did contrary in all, and in such other things besides as seemed not to concern the war managed the state, according to their private ambition and covetousness, perniciously both for themselves and their confederates. What succeeded well the honour and profit of it came most to private men, and what miscarried was to the city's detriment in the war (II.65.6-.12).

Thucydides thus emphasizes some of the most serious problems for a democracy, especially during times of crisis and war, the problems of leadership and unity [35]. Aristotle remarks in the Politics that "democracies

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[34] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, translated by J.A.K. Thomson, London, Penguin, 1987. All references to the Nicomachean Ethics are from this edition using standard notation.

[35] Cf. J.H. Finley, Thucydides, p. 156-157.

undergo revolution particularly on account of the wanton behaviour of the popular leaders" (1304b 21-22) [36]. Without a leader of Pericles stature to take over his place after his death, the leadership of Athens in the War deteriorates. Pericles himself had the following things to say about this topic after the second invasion of the Peloponnesians into Attica in 430:

> For I am of this opinion, that the public prosperity of the city is better for private men than if the private men themselves were in prosperity and the public wealth in decay. For a private man, though in good estate, if his country come to ruin, must of necessity be ruined with it; whereas he that miscarrieth in a flourishing commonwealth shall much more easily be preserved. Since then the commonwealth is able to bear the calamities of private men, and everyone cannot support the calamities of the commonwealth, why should not everyone strive to defend it and not, as you now, astonished with domestic misfortune, forsake the common safety and fall a-censuring both me that counselled the war and yourselves that decreed the same as well as I? (II.60.3-.5)

However, we must acknowledge that Pericles' understanding of the common good of Athens and its connection with an imperial policy makes his idea of the common good unjust. Pericles himself says that the Athenian empire is "in the nature of a tyranny" (II.63.4). Thus, while Pericles may have led Athens well compared to others in the War, his leadership helped sow the seeds of her decline. Certainly Nicias realizes that the Athenians cannot be restrained at this point from wanting more (VI.9): he merely attempts to

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[36] Aristotle, The Politics, Translated and with an Introduction, Notes, and Glossary by Carnes Lord, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984. All references to The Politics are from this edition, using standard notation.

show the Athenians that it is the wrong time for conquest and that Sicily will not be easy to conquer.

Nicias moves on to his first caution to the Athenians about not giving in to their haste and their desires for Sicily:

> ...although I am sure that if I go about to persuade you to preserve what you already hold, and not to hazard things certain for uncertain and future, my words will be too weak to prevail against your humour; yet this I must needs let you know, that neither your haste is seasonable nor your desires easy to be achieved (VI.9.3).

Nicias thus acknowledges the hubris so characteristic of Athens. He further warns the Athenians that by making the Sicilian Expedition, they will leave many enemies behind them, and will make more enemies by their actions (VI.10.1).

Nicias warns the Athenians against believing that the treaty they have with the Spartans (V.23-.24) is a firm one: in doing so, he agrees with the judgement made by Thucydides in V.26 that

> As for the composition between, if any man shall think it not to be accounted with the war, he shall think amiss. For let him look into the actions that passed as they are distinctly set down and he shall find that that deserveth not to be taken for a peace, in which they neither rendered all nor accepted all, according to the articles (V.26.3-.4).

The treaty, Nicias tells us, will be broken if any considerable forces of the Athenians make any moves, for the enemies of Athens will renew the War as they made the peace treaty constrained by calamities, and on terms more dishonourable and under more political necessity than the Athenians

(VI.10.2). Further, there are some points within the treaty that are not yet settled, and some individuals in both the Athenian and Spartan camps have been stirring so as to make the peace "a league in name" (VI.10.2). Some important states, Nicias claims, do not accept the peace terms as they stand, and some are openly at war with Athens, while others maintain a truce with Athens renewable every ten days only because the Spartans have not yet made any moves (VI.10.3). But, Nicias warns, these states are simply biding their time until they hear that Athens has divided her attention and power, "which is the thing we now hasten to do" (VI.10.4), when they will be glad to join in war on Athens with the Sicilians, an alliance with which they value more than any other. Nicias again warns the Athenians off an attempt at Sicily at this time:

> It behoveth us therefore to consider of these things and not to run into new dangers when the state of our own city hangeth unsettled, nor seek a new dominion before we assume that which we already have (VI.10.5).

The Athenians still have problems with their present empire, Nicias says, including a continuing revolt from Chalcidea in Thrace, and doubtful obedience from others (VI.10.6). But now, says Nicias, the Athenians propose to "in all haste" aid the Egestaeans, an ally of the Athenians who has been wronged, it is said; however, they are to defer doing what is right to those rebel states that have wronged Athens (VI.10.7).

Nicias warns that while the Athenians are capable of keeping the Chalcideans under control once subjected, it would be far more difficult to

retain the obedience of the Sicilians, for they are far away from Athens and there are many of them. Indeed, Nicias advises that it would be "madness to invade such" (VI.11.2), as on conquering them they could not be kept under submission, and failing the conquest, Athens would lose the means for ever of attempting another conquest. Nicias believes that Sicily will be less danger to Athens if it falls under the control of Syracuse - even though this is the very scenario the Egestaeans are attempting to frighten the Athenians most with. Nicias reasons that this is so as currently some of the states in Sicily might come to the aid of the Spartans - whereas, if the island came under the control of one state, it would not be likely that they would hazard to attack Athens.

> For by the same means that they, joining with the Peloponnesians, may pull down our dominion, by the same it would be likely that the Peloponnesians would subvert theirs. The Grecians there will fear us most if we go not at all; next if we but show our forces and come quickly away (VI.11.5-.6).

Thus Nicias expresses a fear that was commonplace for the Spartans about making war: keeping stability at home (IV.41; IV.55; IV.80; V.14; V.23). War does put terrible strains on any regime, and keeping unified during the crisis is of paramount importance in successfully prosecuting a war (II.65.18-.19). Nicias' emphasis on the psychological dimension of international affairs can also be seen here, whereby he appreciates the use of fear to keep the Hellenes at bay, and failing that, urges that the Athenians make a

demonstration of their power to strike fear in their opponents and then quickly back off.

Nicias gives another warning to the Athenians about their desires and over-confidence at VI.11:

> For we all know that those things are most admired which are farthest off, and which least come to give proof of the opinion conceived of them. And this, Athenians, is your own case with the Lacedaemonians and their confederates, whom because beyond your hope you have overcome in those things for which at first you feared them, you now in contempt of them turn your arms upon Sicily. But we ought not to be puffed up upon the misfortunes of our enemies, but to be confident then only when we have mastered their designs (VI.11.8-.10).

Nicias warns the Athenians about launching a new expedition or conquest before they have concluded their war with the Spartans. Indeed, Nicias believes that the successes that Athens has made against Sparta have been more the result of misfortunes by the Spartans than by the martial virtue of the Athenians. Nicias believes that the Spartans have set their minds on how to repair their reputation for valour by overthrowing the Athenians. The question for Nicias then, "if we be well advised", is not the Egestaeans in Sicily, but rather, "how we may speedily defend our city against the insidiation of them that favour the oligarchy" (VI.11.12). [37] Nicias also

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[37] It is not completely clear whether Nicias means a threat from the Spartans in terms of direct attack, a fifth column by oligarchs in Athens itself e.g. Alcibiades, or both. As Gomme notes, "Does [Thucydides] mean that Sparta is trying to foment an oligarchic conspiracy in Athens ("by promulgating the principles of oligarchy", Bloomfield), or that Sparta is hostile because she is an oligarchy, or that her hostility is particularly important and dangerous because she is an oligarchy?". A.W. Gomme, A

reminds the Athenians that they have had only a brief respite from the plague (II.47-II.55) and the War, and are just beginning to improve themselves in terms of soldiers and money (VI.12.1). Nicias believes that the new wealth should be spent in Athens rather than on an expedition for "those outlaws which seek for aid, seeing it maketh for them to tell us a specious lie; who contributing only words whilst their friends bear all the danger, if they speed well, shall be disobliged of thanks, if ill, undo their friends for company" (VI.12.1). The policy that Nicias advocates is very cautious, not wishing to risk anything at this point in the War, or at least not any new ventures. His policy then resembles the policy of Pericles as Thucydides records for us at 1.144.1, "There be many other things that give hope of victory in case you do not, whilst you are in this war, strive to enlarge your dominion and undergo other voluntary dangers (for I am afraid of our own errors more than of their designs)".

Nicias then launches an attack aimed directly at his rival, Alcibiades (cf. VI.15). At V.43, Thucydides tells us that Nicias, along with Laches, had negotiated the peace treaty with Sparta, and that Alcibiades did not appreciate being overlooked on so important a matter of state. Alcibiades also opposed the peace with the Spartans from the beginning, alleging that they (the Spartans) could not be relied upon, and that the only reason why the Spartans had made the treaty was to be able to crush Argos and then

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Historical Commentary on Thucydides, Volume IV, p. 235.

isolate Athens and then attack her. Thucydides also tells us that Alcibiades was young and had reached his level of prominence in Athens because of the respect his family was given. Further, Alcibiades' opinion that the best thing for Athens was an alliance with Argos at the time was affected by considerations, in the felicitous translation by Crawley, "not that personal pique had not also a great deal to do with [it]" (V.43.3) [38]. As Nicias says about Alcibiades at VI.12.2-.3,

> Now if there be any man here that for ends of his own, as being glad to be general, especially being yet too young to have charge in chief, shall advise the expedition to the end he may have admiration for his expense upon horses and help from his place to defray that expense, suffer him not to purchase his private honour and splendour with the danger of the public fortune. Believe rather that such men, though they rob the public, do nevertheless consume also their private wealth. Besides, the matter itself is full of great difficulties, such as it is not fit for a young man to consult of, much less hastily to take in hand.

The type of man that Nicias describes here is certainly in line with what Thucydides tells us about in II.65, when they acted according to their private ambition and covetousness, "What succeeded well the honour and profit of it came most to private men, and what miscarried was to the city's detriment in the war" (II.65.12;cf. VI.15). And yet, the picture that Nicias paints of Alcibiades is not quite the same as that which Thucydides himself gives us. More will be said about this below, but we should note that while

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[38] Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, The Crawley translation.

Thucydides does make a good deal out of Alcibiades' private ambitions, he does say that "for the public he excellently managed the war" (VI.15.6).

Nicias is alarmed by the younger men abetting Alcibiades (VI.13.1), and he exhorts the older men not to be ashamed or to think of themselves as cowards if they vote against the expedition. He warns against the expedition again, or in the words of Nicias, "to doat (as they do) upon things absent, knowing that by passion the fewest actions and by reason the most do prosper" (VI.13.1). He urges the Athenians, "for the benefit of their country, which is now cast into greater danger than ever before" (VI.13.2), to vote against conquering Sicily and leave them to manage their own affairs within their current borders. Nicias' policy towards the Egestaeans is to let them finish their war with the Selinuntians by themselves, and that in the future, they should not make such people their confederates that cannot assist the Athenians even though they want help themselves (VI.13.2).

Nicias urges the president, "if you think it your office to take care of the commonwealth and desire to be a good member of the same" (VI.14.1), to put the question of Sicily to a vote and let the Athenians speak on it again. He asks the president to be a physician for his country, one "that hath swallowed down evil counsel" (VI.14.2). Nicias ends his speech by saying that "he truly dischargeth the duty of president who laboureth to do his country the most good, or at least will not willingly do it hurt" (VI.14.3).

After the speech of Nicias, Thucydides writes a brief narrative in VI.15, dealing mainly with Alcibiades. Thucydides writes that the expedition

> was most of all pressed by Alcibiades, both out of desire he had to cross Nicias, with whom he was likewise at odds in other points of state, and also for that he had glanced at him invidiously in his oration, but principally for that he affected to have charge, hoping that himself should be the man to subdue both Sicily and Carthage to the state of Athens, and withal, if it succeeded, to increase his own private wealth and glory (VI.15.3).

Alcibiades is thus confirmed in all those qualities that Nicias had spoken of in VI.12 by Thucydides. Thucydides notes that "his desires were more vast than for the proportion of his estate, both in maintaining of horses and other his expenses, was meet; which proved afterwards none of the least causes of the subversion of the Athenian commonwealth" (VI.15.4).

Thucydides also notes that most Athenians feared Alcibiades "both for his excess in things that concerned his person and form of life and for the greatness of his spirit in every particular action he undertook, as one that aspired to tyranny, they became his enemy" (VI.15.5). Ironically, Alcibiades was the ward of Pericles, and he certainly learned many things from him - and yet, his conduct in regards to his personal estate is the exact opposite of Pericles: Pericles gave up his estate so as not to be suspect (II.13), whereas Alcibiades' for wealth is so great that it is part of what motivates him to lead Athens into a dangerous imperial foray. Finley sums this up well and adds:

> But if Alcibiades, as the present speech shows, had Pericles' ability to dominate the people by the sheer force of his will - something that Nicias lacked entirely - he had the fatal flaw of not being, as Pericles had been, above money. Nor, as is clear from his later desertion to Sparta, was he in any sense patriotic. Hence one returns again to Athens' calamity in having, as rival leaders, two men whose virtues, though complementary, were in each case marred by glaring faults. [39]

Alcibiades comes forward to make his speech, and he attempts to deal with the charges made against him by Nicias. He claims that "it both belongeth unto me more than to any other to have this charge" (VI.16.1) [40]. He claims that the showing that he made by entering chariots in the Olympic games brought not only honour to himself, but also glory and profit for Athens (VI.16.2). As he says, "For the Grecians have thought our city a mighty one, even above the truth, by reason of my brave appearance at the Olympic games, whereas before they thought easily to have warred it down" (VI.16.3). The feat has brought honour to Athens, and also a sense of power for the victories. Alcibiades also believes that the plays put on at his expense, or whatever is found remarkable about him, while making his fellow Athenians envious, make strangers aware of the greatness of Athens. While Alcibiades may believe that this type of showmanship and ostentation impresses foreigners in terms of making Athens appear powerful,

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[39] J.H. Finley, Thucydides, p.218.

[40] While the subject is the command of the Sicilian expedition, Alcibiades speaks here of "rule" (arche) rather than generalship (strategia). Cf. Stephen Forde, The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Ambition, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 78.

Thucydides himself is much less impressed by such appearances. In Book One, Thucydides remarks that if Sparta were seen "desolate and nothing left of it but the temples and floors of the buildings, I think it would breed much unbelief in posterity long hence of their power in comparison of the fame" (I.10.2), and that if one were to consider Athens in the same way, one would conclude that "their power were double to what it is" (I.10.4).

After a digression into a defence of his private life and ambitions, Alcibiades returns to speak about his public activities.

> This is what my youth (and what appears to be my unnatural folly) achieved in its dealing with the power of the Peloponnesians by the use of appropriate speeches, and by its very passion carried conviction (VI.17.1)

Alcibiades thus uses what is a popular criticism of his character, his youthfulness and his "unnatural folly" and attempts to make it seem like a virtue - this apparent vice allowed him to be able to organize the affairs of an anti-Spartan Peloponnesian alliance. His speeches were the instruments of this remarkable feat, which by their "very passion carried conviction" - not costing Athens too much in the way of resources. Further, the "unnatural folly" that Alcibiades speaks of brings us back to questions about his character - only this time there is no warning against it like Nicias might have made - rather, he attempts to impress that his daring nature is an asset for Athens. The criticism that Alcibiades is the target of, then, points towards his extremism - anyone who can be criticized for "unnatural folly" in a city like Athens is certainly extreme. But for this reason, it is not too

far fetched to call Alcibiades quite symbolic of Athens at the time - a most hubristic, daring and extreme leader who does after all have a large following just as Athens is about to launch the Sicilian expedition. Alcibiades tells the Athenians that as long as he flourishes with his character, and Nicias is held to be lucky, they should make use of what each of them has to offer in leading the Sicilian campaign (VI.17.2).

Alcibiades tells the Athenians that they should not change their minds because of the resistance that they will encounter at Sicily (VI.17.3). The cities of Sicily have no cohesion "to fight for their country" (VI.17.4). The citizens of Sicily are ready to rob their own cities by means of clever speeches or by sedition, and if they should fail, they are ready to leave the country (VI.17.5). It is unlikely then that "such a rabble" (VI.17.6) would give consent to what they are told to do, or unite for action in the interests of the common good. Thus, one only has to make a fair offer, and citizens will betray their cities, especially since the cities are reported to be in civil strife (VI.17.6). One cannot help but wonder at Alcibiades' claim of the Sicilian cities' weakness and reported sedition: for it is certainly clear that Alcibiades has no great attachment to Athens, especially after the first part of his speech (VI.16), where he celebrates his accomplishments even if they bring him the envy of his fellow citizens. Certainly this speech is a foreshadowing of the terrible factionalism that later overcomes Athens - including the role that Alcibiades takes in it (VIII.45-.98). In any case,

Alcibiades claims that there are not as many hoplites as they boast of (VI.17.7) - in fact, he says that it is the same for all the Greek cities - that there are never so many as each has reckoned.

The conquest of Sicily then, will be as Alcibiades has told them in so far as his information goes and it will yet be easier - for the Athenians will have as allies many barbarians (e.g. non-Greeks), whose hatred of the Syracusans will lead them into attacking with Athens (VI.17.10). Further, Alcibiades claims that "if we consider the case aright, there will be nothing to hinder us at home" (VI.17.10; contrast Nicias VI.10.5, and Pericles II.65.10). For earlier the Athenians left behind the same enemies which they are now planning to leave on their voyage to Sicily and the Persians as well, and yet founded the empire relying on their sea power (VI.17.11). Finally, Alcibiades claims that the hope of the Spartans against Athens was never less than it is at this point, even though their power is as great as ever - for they are able to invade by land whether the Athenians sailed to Sicily or not, and they will not be able to do any harm with their fleet, for Athens will leave a sufficient number of ships for home defense (VI.17.12).

What reason can the Athenians give for holding back, or what excuse can they give for not helping their confederates (VI.18.1)? Alcibiades launches into a section that anticipates the sort of arguments that Machiavelli would make in the Prince in the sixteenth century. The Athenians ought to defend their confederates, without objecting that they

have not assisted Athens in Hellas, because they help Athens by hindering her enemies in Sicily from attacking Athens (VI.18.2-.3)

> For if we should all sit still, or stand to make choice which were fit to be assisted and which not, we should have little under our government of the estates of other men, but rather hazard our own. For when one is grown mightier than the rest, men use not only to defend themselves against him when he shall invade, but to anticipate him, that he not invade at all. Nor is it in our power to be our own carvers how much we will have subject to us; but considering the case we are in, it is as necessary for us to seek to subdue those that are not under our dominion, as to keep so that are; lest if others be not subject to us, we fall in danger of being subjected unto them. (VI.18.5-.8)

Machiavelli, commenting on the foreign policies of the Romans, wrote

> Thus, the Romans, seeing inconveniences from afar, always found remedies for them and never allowed them to continue so as to escape a war, because they knew that war may not be avoided but is deferred to the advantage of others. So they decided to make war with Philip and Antichus in Greece in order not to have to do so in Italy... [41]

For Machiavelli and Alcibiades, then, "it is a very natural and ordinary thing to acquire, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised or not blamed" (Prince, III, p.14; cf. VI.18.9-.12).

While Alcibiades does share some ideas about imperial rule with his mentor, his view of international affairs does not completely mirror that of Pericles. Whereas for Alcibiades distinctions have lost their meaning about just and unjust wars because of his exhortation about anticipating trouble

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[41] Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, A New Translation with an Introduction, by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985, Chapter III, "Of Mixed Principalities", pp. 12-13. All references to The Prince are from this edition, citing chapter and page.

abroad and his desire for glory and conquest through war, Pericles states that "For though to such as have it in their own election (being otherwise in good estate), it were madness to make choice of war..." (II.61.1). For while Pericles stands firm on not giving up the empire (II.63) and believes that it is well worth the sacrifices demanded for the glory (II.61) and for safeties sake, Alcibiades does not give any limits to the extent of the empire he has in mind in Greece (VI.18.10). Not giving away the empire and exhorting to enlarge it are two very different things, and by attempting to enlarge the empire without finishing off the war with Sparta, Athens goes against the advice Pericles gave (II.65.10) - to remain quiet and not to extend the empire. [42] That it is a problem for an imperial power to stay at rest and not continue to expand was noted by Aristotle:

> Most cities of this sort preserve themselves when at war, but once having acquired [imperial] rule they come to ruin; they lose their edge, like iron, when they remain at peace. The reason is that the legislator has not educated them to be capable of being at leisure (Politics 1334a 6-10; compare VI.18.13-.15).

Alcibiades tells the Athenians that they cannot look upon a quiet life in the same way others do - unless they decide to change their habitual way of life (VI.18.8). This idea of the Athenian love of action is spoken of by the Corinthians (I.70) and Nicias acknowledges it in VI.9.3. Another idea that

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[42] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, p. 211.

drives the Athenians towards imperial expansion, the desire for glory and rule over others [43], is brought up in the next sentences,

> Let us rather make reckoning by enterprising abroad to increase our power at home, and proceed on our voyage that we may cast down the haughty conceit of the Peloponnesians and show them the contempt and slight account we make of our present ease by undertaking this our expedition into Sicily. Whereby, either conquering those states we shall become masters of all Greece, or weaken the Syracusians, to the benefit of ourselves and our confederates. And for our security to stay, if any city shall come to our side, or to come away if otherwise, our galleys will afford it (VI.18.9-.12).

Alcibiades then turns to deal with Nicias' arguments for non-intervention and his "stirring of debate between the young men and the old" (VI.18.13). To do this, he poses as a statesman in the Athenian tradition [44], telling the Athenians that "with the same decency wherewith your ancestors, consulting young and old together, have brought our dominion to the present height, endeavour you likewise to enlarge the same" (VI.18.13).

Alcibiades ends his speech in a disturbing but not too unexpected way: he advocates that the young and the old cannot do anything without each other, and that "the simplest, the middle sort, and the exactest judgements tempered together is it that doth the greatest good", (VI.18.14) and then goes on to advocate that the best policy, or the greatest good for Athens, is

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[43] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, pp. 77-79.

[44] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, p.210.

to embark on war to keep Athens from going soft (VI.18.14-.15; contrast Aristotle Politics 1334a6-10).

The Athenians, after hearing Alcibiades, and the Egestaeans and Leontine exiles, became "far more earnestly bent upon the journey than they were before" (VI.19.2). Nicias attempts to dissuade the Athenians from the voyage by exaggerating the amount of provisions required in his second speech of Book Six - he attempts to steer Athens from the dangers of insufficient strength and over confidence in this escapade [45]. While Nicias can see that the Athenians are "violently bent on this expedition" (VI.20.1), he nevertheless delivers his own contrary opinion on the Sicilian expedition to the Athenians. The Athenians are embarking on an expedition "against great cities" (VI.20.3), says Nicias, thus showing that the real intent of the Athenians is to conquer all of Sicily rather than simply aiding the Egestaeans and the Leontineans [46]. These cities are not subjects of one another, and thus they are not in a position to want to be ruled by the Athenians as opposed to their present liberty (VI.20.3). There are seven Greek cities on the island "furnished in all respects after the manner of our own army, and especially those two against which we bend our forces most, Selinus and Syracuse" (VI.20.4).

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[45] Cf. A.W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, Volume IV, p. 260.

[46] Cf. A.W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, Volume IV, p.256.

In these cities, says Nicias, there are many hoplites, archers, javelin throwers, and many triremes with men to crew them (VI.20.5). Further, they have private and public sources of money through the temples of Selinus, and the Syracusans receive a tribute from the barbarians. However, where they have the greatest advantage over the Athenians according to Nicias is that "they abound in horses, and have corn of their own, not fetched in from other places" (VI.20.9; cf. VII.14., VII.24) [47]. Nicias believes that the Athenians will require more than a fleet and a small army - they will need a good sized infantry to sail along with them - if they want to "do anything worthy of our design" (VI.21.1). This will be especially important if the cities at Sicily, "terrified by us, should now hold all together" (VI.21.1). Nicias then foreshadows his performance at Sicily in VI.21.2 by saying "it would be a shame either to come back with a repulse or to send for a new supply afterwards, as if we had not wisely considered our enterprise at first" (VI.21.2). At VII.48, Nicias does not want to withdraw from Sicily because of the shame it would bring him. As Gomme notes,

> Nikias' pride and consequent cowardice in the face of personal disgrace lead him to put forward as disgraceful a proposition as any general in history: rather than risk execution, he will

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[47] Gomme notes that this was of special relevance in so far as states that do not need to import their corn are less vulnerable to naval blockade. A.W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, Volume IV, p. 257.

> throw away the fleet and many thousands of other peoples lives, and put his country in mortal peril [48].

Nicias advises the Athenians that they must proceed with sufficient provisions, knowing that they will be far from Athens - something quite different than aiding confederates near Athens and allies (VI.21.3). Nicias suggests taking "many men of arms of our own, of our confederates, and of our subjects" (VI.22.1) and as many as they can hire or persuade from the Peloponnese to come with them. He advises the Athenians to make sure they have many archers, slingers, an overwhelmingly superior navy so that they might be able to bring all the supplies they need, including food, for the army will be so great as not every city will be able to accommodate them in Sicily. He admonishes the Athenians that "we must as much as we can provide them ourselves and not rely on others. Above all, we must take hence as much money as we can; for as for that which is said to be ready at Egesta, think it ready in words, but not in deeds" (VI.22.4-.5). Nicias is vindicated on this point at VI.46.1, when "for the rest of the money promised there was none, only there appeared thirty talents".

The expedition to Sicily will find difficulty in subduing the enemy and saving themselves (VI.23.1). [49] The Athenians must be aware that they are

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[48] A.W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, Volume IV, p. 426.

[49] Gomme has an extended digression on this sentence. It appears to me that his remark in Volume IV, p.261, is the correct way to think of this sentence in the context of the speech. "Nikias, in contrast to the easy

going on an expedition that will take them in to a hostile country, and that they must be able to become masters of the country the first day they land there, for failing to do so, they will assuredly find hostility against them (VI.23.2). Nicias' concerns of not being strong enough and being too overconfident for the expedition is again repeated at VI.23.3-.4.

> Which fearing, and knowing that the business requires much good advice and more good fortune (which is a hard matter, being we are but men), I would so set forth as to commit myself to fortune as little as I may and take with me an army that in likelihood should be secure. And this I conceive to be both the surest course for the city in general and the safest for us that go the voyage.

Nicias ends his speech with an offer to resign his place as general if anyone has an opinion contrary to his own (VI.23.5).

Chapter VI.24 represents the culmination of Athenian imperialism - that moment when "every one alike fell in love with the enterprise" (VI.24.4). Nicias had imagined that the Athenians would abandon the expedition upon knowledge of the resources required, or failing that, that he would make the expedition securely. However,

> ...the Athenians gave not over the desire they had of the voyage for the difficulty of the preparation, but were the more influenced thereby to have it proceed; and the contrary fell out of that which he before expected. For they approved his

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confidence which prevails in his audience..., reminds them that a safe return cannot be taken for granted. Thucydides represents him as doing so in an allusive form of words of which the meaning is in many contexts quite clear...but in this case no more certain and indisputable to its original hearers than to us". A.W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydides.

> counsel and thought now there would be no danger at all. And every one alike fell in love with the enterprise (VI.24.2-.4).

The massive preparations that the Athenians were to make thus act as reassurance - it makes the expedition all that more appealing - so much so that they believed that there would not be any danger at all.

Thucydides' comment that "every one alike fell in love with the enterprise", an imperial enterprise of the grandest proportions, certainly invites discussion. While the Athenians might have been able to claim with some plausibility in their defense of empire at the Congress of Sparta (I.75.3) that their empire is justified on considerations of honour and not simply profit and fear, by the time of the Sicilian expedition, honour can no longer taken to be a serious part of their views. The Athenian empire is by the time of the Sicilian expedition, a tyranny (cf. II.63.4; III.37.2) - the rule over others, without regard to justice, in the interest of the ruler. While Thucydides does say that the old men were interested in conquest, and that the young men desired to see a foreign country and to gaze, the majority of the Athenians "made account to gain by it not only their wages for the time, but also so as to amplify the state in power as that their stipend should endure forever" (VI.24.5). The empire now represents only profit and safety for Athens - and we must bear this in mind when we consider and compare Thucydides' placement of the Melian Dialogue and the Sicilian expedition together. The Sicilian expedition, far from representing any type of honourable mission, is for most Athenians their falling in love with the idea

of an eternal stipend. The harshness and tyranny of the Athenian empire as seen in the Melian Dialogue, and the Sicilian expedition itself, can certainly trace a good deal to this fact, the loss of honour or justice in the conduct of foreign affairs [50]. The disappearance of honour or justice can be seen as a result of two important factors: first - that the greed of most of the Athenians is more important than their love of honour of justice (VI.24.5); and secondly, when all notions of justice are forgotten in favour of interest (V.90.1). It must be said then that the Athenians' neglect of honour or justice in favour of interest and security alone in foreign affairs undermines their position - it leaves them with a fragile and tyrannic empire [51]; fragile in so far as the Sicilian expedition stretches their resources, and tyrannic as it does not consider justice or honour. In any case, "through the vehement desire thereunto of the most", those that were not in favour kept it to themselves, fearing that if they held up their hands that they would be thought unpatriotic, or, "evil-affected to the state" (VI.24.6).

In VI.31, Thucydides tells us that

> For this preparation, being the first Grecian power that ever went out of Greece from one only city, was the most sumptuous and the most glorious of all that ever had been sent forth before it to that day...And the fleet was no less noised amongst those against whom it was to go for the strange boldness of the attempt and gloriousness of the show than it was for the

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[50] Cf. Jacqueline de Romilly, Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism, pp.74-75; Stephen Forde, The Ambition to Rule, pp.150-151.

[51] Contrast Xenophon, Cyropaedia, (VII.V.77-.78).

> excessive report of their number, for the length of the voyage, and for that it was undertaken with so vast future hopes in respect of their present power (VI.31.1-.10).

Thucydides thus finishes his narrative of the launching of the Sicilian expedition in the same way he began it: explicating about Athenian daring (cf. VI.1 and VI.31.10). While the Sicilian expedition could have succeeded, according to Thucydides, save the "want of knowledge of the senders of what was necessary for those that went the voyage" (II.65.18) and the political situation in Athens, making such an expedition went against the judgement of Pericles, the statesman most he most admired (cf. II.65).

Through the course of the History, Thucydides develops the idea that power is a more important concern than justice in war, and perhaps in international affairs generally. That this is a deplorable situation which exists to this day is clear, and Thucydides treatment of this condition and some of its terrible consequences, war and imperialism, admonish us to be prudent in foreign affairs.

In the Mytilenaean Debate, justice and expediency are brought into focus - it throws light on the consequences that are possible if justice is not given weight in deciding upon courses of action. The figure of Cleon, we must say, foreshadows the Melian Dialogue, wherein justice plays no part, and the full meaning of expediency in foreign affairs is apparent for all. Further, we are witness to the remarkable Diodotus, and his efforts to stop the Athenians from taking very harsh actions on the Mytilenaeans.

The Melian Dialogue raises some very serious questions about the normative dimension of "realism" as a theory. If justice is left out of foreign policy considerations, and policy becomes based solely on considerations of expediency and power, international affairs may certainly come to resemble a situation in which the strong rule the weak as they see fit, and considerations of the common good become irrelevant. It is also a good example of how not to conduct a foreign policy from the perspective of the weaker side, as the Melians show us in this case. The Melians made a very serious error in not agreeing to the terms of the Athenians. Certainly one

may accept rule over one's own state without disgrace if the alternative is destruction. As the Athenians tell the Melians, "For you have not in hand a match of valour upon equal terms, wherein to forfeit your honour, but rather a consultation upon your safety that you resist not such as be so far your overmatches" (V.101.2). However, to say that the Athenians are correct in their view of justice as the balance of power (V.89.2) is as erroneous as the Melian political miscalculations, for the balance of power is certainly not the same thing as the common good.

The Sicilian expedition, the most daring adventure of the Athenians in the History, certainly raises questions about statesmanship and the relationship of power and justice in foreign policy. The debate between Nicias and Alcibiades is important in so far as it reveals a lack of political leadership in Athens at that time. While Alcibiades certainly is a talented and charismatic leader, his acquisitiveness and desire for glory are part of what motivates him to lead Athens on the expedition - into a dangerous new war that ultimately leads to Athens' downfall. While Nicias wanted to hold the Athenians back from the Sicilian expedition, he did not have the ability, as did Alcibiades, to lead. This situation points to the need for political leaders who possess both good will and qualities of leadership. The Sicilian expedition also raises the themes of power and justice to their highest level. For certainly the launching of the expedition stretched Athenian resources very far, and this episode which began with the Athenians grasping for ever

more[52] led to their downfall. Further, the Athenian neglect of justice leaves them with a tyrannical empire.

Thucydides does not make judgements as to the justice of actions when he writes about the nature of relations between states. However, it would be a mistake to attribute to Thucydides a cynical realism: Thucydides never tells us in his own words that might is right.[53] Certainly he demonstrates through the History that power politics is a fact of life in international affairs, however we may disapprove of it. Rather than a lesson in cynicism, then, Thucydides teaches prudence in foreign affairs, a recognition that too often justice gives way to expediency, and that we must not be blind to the realities of power politics.

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[52] Cf. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, The Origins of the Peloponnesian War, p. 23.

[53] Cf. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, The Origins of the Peloponnesian War, pp. 15, 19.

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